

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name The Excelsior Engine Co. No 2 Firehouse/ Exempt Firemen Association Headquarters

other names/site number "666 Polk Street"

2. Location

street & number 6106 Polk Street (Block 141, Lot 4)

☐ not for publication

city or town West New York

☐ vicinity

state New Jersey code 034 County Hudson zip code 07093

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I certify that this ☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☐ locally. ☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

Deputy SHPO Assistant Commissioner for Natural & Historic Resources

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. ☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

☐ entered in the National Register.
☐ See continuation sheet.

☐ determined eligible for the
National Register.
☐ See continuation sheet.

☐ determined not eligible for the
National Register.

☐ removed from the National
Register.

☐ other, (explain:) _____

5. Classification**Ownership of Property**

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- ☐ private
- ☒ public-local
- ☐ public-State
- ☐ public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- ☒ building(s)
- ☐ district
- ☐ site
- ☐ structure
- ☐ object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing
1	
1	

buildings

sites

structures

objects

Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Fire station (volunteer)

Meeting hall

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Vacant/Not in use

7. Description**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Romanesque Revival

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Stone/poured concrete

walls Speckled glazed orange brick

Common red brick

roof Asphalt

other Terra cotta and limestone accents

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

See continuation sheet

8 Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria considerations

(mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- ☐ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ **B** removed from its original location.
- ☐ **C** a birthplace or grave.
- ☐ **D** a cemetery.
- ☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object or structure.
- ☐ **F** a commemorative property.
- ☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on continuation sheets.)

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Social history

Period of Significance

1897-1980

Significant Dates

1897 (construction date)

1923 (addition and renovations)

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Robert C. Dixon, Architect

William Mayer Jr. Architect

Frederick Kleine and Sons, Builder

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey
- #
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering
- Record #

Primary location of additional data

- ☐ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other

Name of repository:

The Excelsior Engine Co. Firehouse

Name of Property

Hudson County, New Jersey

County and State

10. Geographical Data**Acreage of property** .058 acres**Latitude / Longitude Coordinates**

(Note to Preparers: NJ HPO will complete this portion of the Registration Form for all Preparers, based on the coordinates derived from the Site Map or District Map that HPO produces.)

1. Lat 40.791047 Long -74.017212
2. Lat 40.790906 Long -74.016905
3. Lat 40.790848 Long -74.016952
4. Lat 40.790988 Long -74.017262

(NJ HPO will place additional coordinates, if needed, on a continuation sheet for Section 10.)

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet for Section 10.)

Boundary Justification Statement

(Explain, on the section sheet following the Verbal Boundary Description, how the chosen boundaries meet the requirements for boundary selection and are the most appropriate boundaries for the nominated property or district.)

11. Form Prepared Byname/title Carla Cielo, Historic Preservation Consultantorganization None date November 1, 2021street & number 548 County Road 579 telephone 908-310-2505city or town Ringoes state New Jersey zip code 08551**Additional Documentation**

(Submit the additional items with the completed form that are outlined in the "Standard Order of Presentation" that NJ HPO provides. Each page must contain the name of the nominated property or district, and the State and the county in which the property or district is located. Consult with NJ HPO if you have questions.)

Property Owner

(Either provide the name and address of the property owner here or provide the information separately to NJ HPO. Check with NJ HPO for other requirements. All owners' names and addresses must be provided, including public and non-profit owners, but their presence on the form, itself, is not required).

name Town of West New Yorkstreet & number 428 60th Street telephone 201-295-5100city or town West New York state NJ zip code 07093**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties and to amend existing listings. The proper completion of this form and the related requirements is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.470 *et seq.*)**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

Direct questions regarding the proper completion of this form or questions about related matters to the Registration Section, New Jersey Historic Preservation Office, Mail code 501-04B, PO Box 420, Trenton, NJ 08625-0420.

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The Excelsior Engine Co. No. 2 Firehouse/Exempt Firemen Association Headquarters was built in the Romanesque Revival style in 1897 by Robert C. Dixon Jr. Architect (illustration 1). This two-story brick firehouse is located mid-block on Polk Street on the east bound side in West New York, New Jersey (photos 1-4). Its original 25' x 50' footprint occupied the front half of a 100-foot-deep city lot and extended to the front and side property lines (illustration 2). The adjacent wood frame homes are separated from the firehouse by narrow alleyways. The Association of Exempt Firemen acquired the firehouse in 1916 for use as their headquarters, and about 8 years later, hired architect William Mayer Jr. to construct an addition and renovate the interior (illustration 3). The current appearance reflects these changes. The firehouse is counted as one contributing building on site.

Dixon's Polk Street facade retains a high degree of integrity (photo 4). The facade is faced with glazed orange bricks speckled with black pyrites and set in thin "butter" joints with brown pigmented mortar. The accents are limestone and terra cotta (photos 7-9). The bearing brick side walls are red common brick set in a five course American bond on a schist foundation (photos 1 and 3). The addition was built in 1923 at the back end of the firehouse, with similar brickwork but on a poured concrete foundation (photos 10-13). The Association of Exempt Firemen replaced the name panel above the arched entry and removed the open cupola but these changes minimally affected its original character (photo 5, illustrations 1 and 4). Later 20th century changes are minimal and include replacing the glass in the transoms and in the oculus (photos 4 and 9).

Facade Composition Dixon's three-bay facade is symmetrically organized with a prominent 2½ story center bay that is flanked by narrower 2-story side bays. The center bay has arched-topped wagon entry doors (7'-9" wide x 11' high) on the ground floor, paired arched-topped windows on the second level and a brick-lined oculus above (photos 4, 6 and 9). The upper half story fronts a mini central tower that has a hipped roof lined with crown molding (photo 3). An open circular cupola with eight mini columns and a conical metal roof that supported a flag staff, originally rose from the apex of the hipped roof but, as mentioned, was removed by the Association of Exempt Firemen (illustrations 1, 4 and 5). Both side bays have smaller arched-topped pedestrian entrances at the ground floor and a window with a transom and an exaggerated limestone lintel at the second floor.

The wide center bay is separated from the smaller side bays with brick pilasters which, at the first floor, are rusticated and have terra cotta Corinthian capitols and limestone bases. At the second floor, the pilasters are lighter and are paired and have smaller limestone bases (photos 4 and 7, illustration 6). Mini pilasters rise from the keystones above the paired arches of the second floor windows in the center bay (photo 9). The corner pilasters are full height and have bull-nose brick corners which transition to the common brick side walls (illustration 6). A limestone belt course separates the first and second floors. Four rows of corbeled brickwork transition flat sections of wall to the belt course, to the cornice at the side bays and to the cornice at the hipped roof of the mini central tower (photos 3 and 9).

Exterior Details The details incorporated into the brick pattern work are characteristic of Dixon's masterful hand at composition. The five semi-circular Romanesque arches spring from limestone blocks which, at the wagon entry arch in the center bay, are carved and which, at the pedestrian entries and second floor window, are flat (photos 6, 8 and 9, Illustration 6). The segmental arch above the wagon entry arch has seven brick courses with tapered mortar joints (photo 6, illustration 6). The arches above the pedestrian doors have six courses and the second floor arches have five courses (photo 9, illustration 6). This includes two courses that are corbeled. Scroll-

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faced limestone keystones adorn the three arches in the center bay. The keystone at wagon entry arch is the largest and is carved "NO. 2" for the number of the horse-pulled fire truck (photos 5 and 6, Illustration 6). Immediately above the keystone is the name panel - originally "Excelsior Engine Co" in terra cotta which was replaced by the exiting raised metal name panel which reads "Exempt Firemen Ass'n" (photo 5, illustration 6).

Doors The original double-leaf, arch-topped wagon entry doors remain albeit as modified by the Exempt Firemen Association (photo 6). Their original appearance shows in Dixon's architectural drawings and in a 1915 photograph (illustrations 6 and 7). They were built as ornamental two-panel doors with broad styles and rails, and fancy iron grillwork with scrolls and a wavy sunburst pattern over dimpled sheet metal in the upper panels and beaded boards lined molded sticking in the lower panels. The fancy iron grillwork and sheet metal were removed by the Exempt Firemen association and replaced with flat boards as indicated in a 1929 photograph entitled "home of the Exempt Firemen" (illustration 4). Remarkably, however, the original styles and rails and some of the sticking remains intact and the original decorative beaded boards remain in the lower panels under plywood (photo 6).

The pedestrian entries in the side bays originally had wooden two-panel single-leaf doors with raised panels lined with molded sticking and were topped by arched glazed transoms (illustration 6). Photographic documentation shows that the Exempt Firemen Association replaced the upper panels with a single sheet of glass (illustration 4). The doors were replaced in the second half of the 20th century with single-leaf hollow-metal fire doors (photo 4).

Windows and Transoms The four second-level windows originally had double-hung, wood sash (no dividers) lined with narrow brick molding and were topped by glazed rectangular transoms. The central oculus was fitted with an undivided pane of glass. The circa 1915 postcard view suggests that the sash and brick molding had been painted green (illustration 1). The Exempt Firemen Association initially retained the windows and transoms but installed replacement sash, cased the brick molding and replaced the clear glass in the transoms and oculus with orange panels in the second half of the 20th century (photos 4 and 9).

Side and Rear Walls The side walls are brick and have no windows. As indicated by Dixon's original architectural drawings of the firehouse, the 50-foot long first floor extended 11 feet beyond the 39' long second floor and a shed roof covered the extension (illustrations 7 and 8). This outline remains apparent in the brickwork (photo 10). The original rear walls (first floor and basement) were demolished along with the construction of the addition. The original second floor rear wall was incorporated into the plan of the second floor at the time of the addition. According to Dixon's drawings the original rear walls had paired paneled wagon doors topped by a five-light transom and a segmental brick arch on the first floor and three windows with 2-over-2 divided lights, two-light transoms and flat lintels on the second floor (illustration 7).

Roof Before the construction of the addition the main roof sloped to the yard at back of the property. The mini central tower which extends above the roof above is accessed from a small doorway in the back wall that opens onto the roof (illustration 7). A brick hose shaft extends above the roofline on the south side. It originally had ventilation panels and a small tin roof.

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Exterior - Rear Addition The 42-foot long addition was designed by Architect William Mayer Jr. in 1923.¹ It is constructed with bearing brick side walls to match the original side walls but has a poured concrete foundation and windows with segmental arch headers on all floors including the basement. It lengthened the building to within 8 feet of the rear property line to create an overall footprint of 25 'x 92 ' (illustration 3; photos 10-12). Iron ties extend through the brickwork to secure second level joists (photo 13). Pedestrian doors accessed by steps are centered on the rear wall at the first floor and basement. The roof is pitched towards the original section creating a valley at the junction of the two sections. Internal gutters divert water into the sewer system. In recent years, this design became the source of water entry.

The Original Interior Floor Plans Dixon's architectural drawings show the original layout of the first and second floors (illustration 8). The apparatus room (18'-4" wide x 47'-6" long x 12'-4" high ceilings) occupied the full length of the first floor (illustration 10). It had wagon entry doors on both ends and access to a three-story hose shaft which extends above the roofline. A 5-foot wide section along the length of the north wall was partitioned off for an entrance hall, straight-run stairs to the second floor and basement, a storage closet and bathrooms. The plans do not show any provisions for stabling horses or a use for the basement. The firehouse was unheated and had three in-wall vents in both side walls.

The second floor had a small front reception room (21 'x 23') with a decorative mantel on the north wall opposite the hose shaft. Paired sliding doors joined the reception room and a meeting room at the stair landing. A small room for uniform storage also shows on Dixon's plans but was omitted to make the meeting room larger according to the August 30, 1897 Township Meeting Minutes (illustrations 8 and 11).

The original finishes show in Dixon's longitudinal section (illustration 8). The apparatus room had baseboard, chair rail and picture rail molding and was finished with beaded board wainscoting below the picture rail and had a beaded board ceiling lined with crown molding. The second floor appears to have had plaster walls lined with baseboard, chair and picture rail molding and crown molding. The staircase had a turned newel post and an open balustrade at the landing. Dixon's original window trim remains at the second floor front windows. It is machine-planed with a symmetrical Victorian-era profile and has a reeded stool beneath a projecting sill (photo 24).

Hudson Engineering Company of West New York designed the first heating system for the firehouse in 1908 (illustrations 9-11). The dated plans are signed "W. M.". The plans included a steam boiler, a basement coal room and radiators on the first and second floors. The remaining cast filigree radiator from that era was manufactured by the American Radiator Company (photo 26).

Rear Addition and Interior Renovations Architect William Mayer Jr. renovated and expanded the interior of the old firehouse in 1923 for use as an assembly and meeting hall.² The original 18'-4" x 47'-6" apparatus room was expanded for use as an assembly room (approximately 23'-6" wide x 88'-6" long) for large group functions (photos 14-15). The stairs to the second floor and basement were moved from the front of the building to the rear addition along the north wall (photos 19-21). The upper flight has a landing midway, square newel posts (paneled

¹ "Town of West New York, Hudson County, N.J. Notice to Builders and Contractors" Hudson Observer (date and page not known); Eickmann, 1948, p. 130.

² "Town of West New York, Hudson County, N.J. Notice to Builders and Contractors" Hudson Observer (date and page not known); Eickmann, 1948, p. 130.

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at the first floor and plain elsewhere) and square balusters and remain within a later enclosure. The bathrooms were also moved to the northeast corner within the addition (photo 18). Pressed tin-coated steel ceiling panels, wainscoting and a broad cornice was added throughout the assembly room (remains beneath a modern drop ceiling and plywood wall paneling - photos 16, 19 and 20). In the area of the original firehouse, the tin-coated ceiling was placed over the original beaded board ceiling (photo 17). Strip flooring was added throughout.

William Mayer Jr. also enlarged and reconfigured the second floor. The new staircase within the addition, provides the circulation to access the entire second floor (photo 21). The stair opening is lined with a simple balustrade with closely spaced square balusters. A large meeting room was built in place of the former reception room, meeting area and stairway in the original firehouse (photo 22). The original fireplace on the north wall was removed and the hose shaft which projects into the room on the south wall was adorned with a decorative mantel. The original rear wall of the firehouse became an interior wall with an 8-foot wide opening added in place of two windows to join the meeting room to a small anti room within the addition (photo 23). Two small offices, a hallway and a bathroom are at the rear of the addition (photo 21). The second floor has plaster walls lined with baseboard and flat chair rail molding. Pressed tin-coated wainscoting remains in the anti-room (photo 25).

The interior doors that were added in 1923 have five horizontally-oriented raised panels or one glass panel above three raised panels. Older doors have two flat panels line with sticking and may have been reused from the original firehouse. The bathrooms which were added in 1923 have saloon-style wooden stall doors (photo 18) also with horizontal panels. Window and door trim from the 1920s era consists of butted flat casing topped by 2" high hood molding (photo 27).

The original rear foundation wall was removed to expand the utilitarian 7-foot high basement. Mayer's adaptive reuse plan provided for a kitchen with pantry and serving areas at the back of the addition; a bar and dinning area in the center of the building; and a mechanical room and a bathroom in the front of the original building (photos 28-31). The boiler was relocated and upgraded and radiators were added throughout.

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The Excelsior Engine Co. No. 2 Firehouse/Exempt Firemen Association Headquarters was built in 1897 for the Excelsior No. 2 volunteer fire company of West New York, New Jersey and was enlarged and renovated in 1923 for use as an assembly hall and headquarters of the Association of Exempt Firemen of West New York (illustrations 1 and 4). Both organizations were founded in the 1890's and contributed to the community of West New York. The Excelsior Engine Company is important to the history of firefighting in West New York and Hudson County. The Exempt Firemen Association is significant as a national organization that was founded to support volunteer firemen with active localized chapters. The firehouse/headquarters building is an excellent example of the work of noted local architect Robert C. Dixon, who was active in Hudson County in the 1890s and early 20th century and an excellent adaptive reuse by architect William Mayer Jr. of West New York. Dixon had a remarkable flair for facade composition masterfully combining the Romanesque Revival style of architecture with classically inspired details. The nominated property is the oldest remaining firehouse in West New York and the facade remains nearly 95% original. The firehouse/assembly hall holds local significance under Criterion A for its association with firefighting. It also meets Criterion C for local architectural significance as a well-preserved example of a Romanesque Revival firehouse, the work of a master architect and an early adaptive reuse. The Period of Significance extends from its construction in 1897 and extends to 1980 to signify a shift in use of the building as a center of the Exempt community to being sporadic and random.

In the 1890's, when both the Excelsior Engine Company and the Association of Exempt Firemen were founded, West New York, New Jersey was part of Union Township. Bordered to the east by the Hudson River and New York City, to the north by Guttenberg, to the south by Union City (formerly Union Hill) and Weehawken and to the west by North Bergen, this tiny 1.3 square mile area of the Hudson Palisades in Northern Hudson County, was traversed by two main thoroughfares (Bulls Ferry Road and Hudson Avenue) running north/south and had several developed sections interspersed between larger farm tracts. About 5,000 people lived there in 1895.¹ West New York incorporated as a town July 8, 1898. It was growing as an area known for garment work and in 1900 had two silk mills, a few small embroidery houses, a band stand, two schools, a wood framed bowling alley, a few churches, a dance hall, an ice factory and all necessary supporting mercantile.

Volunteer Fire Companies The earliest fire companies to form in Northern Hudson County that served the area that became West New York date to the early 1860s and include the Pioneer Hose Company No. 1 of the Town of Union which organized in 1862 and the Washington Hook and Ladder Company of Guttenberg which was formed in 1863.² Friendship Engine Company formed within the area that became West New York in 1868 or 9. The need to disperse additional fire companies throughout the area that was to become West New York became apparent by the late 1880s. Four volunteer fire companies quickly formed between 1889 and 1890. The first two, Empire Hook and Ladder company and Hickory Engine Company organized in 1889. Liberty Hose Company No. 1 organized February 9, 1890 just 13 days before Excelsior.³ The Excelsior Engine Company No. 2 organized February 22, 1890 (illustration 23).⁴ In those early days of firefighting many volunteers were needed to pull equipment and pump the "side-bars" by hand.

¹ The Committee, 1914.; Minutes of a Regular Meeting of the Township Committee, April 27, 1897.

² Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of Exempt Fireman of the Town of West New York, NJ August 9, 1912, p. 30. and July 12, 1913, p. 51.

³ The Committee, 1914.

⁴ Minutes of a Regular Monthly Meeting of the Excelsior Engine Co. No. 2 of the Town of West New York, Cover page

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Excelsior began with the purchase of the Excelsior Hose Carriage from the city of Hoboken and a 400 foot hose that was supplied by the township.⁵ A second apparatus (a steam-powered fire engine) was purchased from New York City in 1896. It was capable of throwing water over a 3 story house under 60 pounds of pressure.⁶ In October of 1896, with a team of rented horses, Excelsior Engine Company worked to put out a fire at White Brewery, a beloved landmark built in 1855 with a beer garden and ferry excursion from New York City.⁷ An old schoolhouse on Polk Street served as their headquarters. Each fire company paid rent and purchased much of their own equipment, until the town council financed the construction of a proper firehouse.

The old schoolhouse soon became “too small and unsuitable for the purpose” of housing their apparatus.⁸ In January of 1896, the Excelsior Engine company petitioned the Township board to build or procure “suitable quarters” for housing their apparatus.⁹ But nothing came from this petition. In January of 1897, the company petitioned the township a second time.¹⁰ This time the township acted swiftly to fulfill their request. In February 1897, the Township Fire Committee advertised that it was looking to purchase one or two lots for the construction of a new firehouse.¹¹ Four property owners offered their lots for sale on King, People and Polk Streets. The \$500.00 Polk Street property of Township committee member Charles Glueck and his wife Phillipine was chosen.¹²

In May of 1897, a committee of three was formed to choose the architect to design a new ‘brick’ firehouse to cost \$3,500.00 or less.¹³ Plans were submitted by architects Philip H. Diemer and Robert C. Dixon. Dixon’s plans were approved (illustrations 7 and 8).¹⁴ Six contractors submitted bids ranging from \$3,400 to \$3,737.00. Friedrich Kleinke and Sons of 509 Palisade Avenue, Weehawken submitted the lowest bid of \$3,400.00 and was hired as the builder of the firehouse.¹⁵ Frederick Kleinke (1849 -1914) immigrated from Germany in 1880 and worked his way up as a carpenter and builder.¹⁶ Louis Miller excavated the bedrock for the foundation.¹⁷ Kleinke received his first payment of \$800, August 9, 1897 and completed construction within four months. Dixon oversaw the construction and reported completion October 20, 1897.¹⁸

The Excelsior Fire Company promptly moved into their new headquarters. Opening celebrations which included a police escorted parade with 9 local fire companies marching and all houses along the parade route decorated with flags, bunting and lanterns, were held October 23, 1897. At the close of the parade, the company held a

⁵ The Committee, 1914; Minutes of a Regular Meeting of the Township Committee, June 11, 1890.

⁶ The Committee, 1914: _____. “North Hudson” *The Jersey Journal*, February 24, 1896 p. 2.

⁷ Minutes of a regular meeting of the Township Committee, December 22, 1896 “Excelsior Eng. Co. #2 presented a bill of \$5.00 from Chas Glueck for use of a team of horses at the White Brewery fire.”

⁸ The Committee, 1914: Minutes of a regular meeting of the Township Committee, January 12, 1897.

⁹ _____. “North Hudson” *The Jersey Journal*, January 16, 1896 p. 2.

¹⁰ Minutes of a regular meeting of the Township Committee, January 12, 1897.

¹¹ Minutes of a regular meeting of the Township Committee, February 9, 1896.

¹² Minutes of a regular meeting of the Township Committee, February 23, 1897 and March 9, 1897.

¹³ Minutes of a regular meeting of the Township Committee, May 4, 1897.

¹⁴ Minutes of a regular meeting of the Township Committee, May 18, 1897 and May 27, 1897.

¹⁵ Minutes of a regular meeting of the Township Committee, June 14, 1897.

¹⁶ USA Passport application of Frederick Kleinke May 7, 1910.

¹⁷ Minutes of a regular meeting of the Township Committee, August 30, 1897.

¹⁸ Minutes of a regular meeting of the Township Committee, December 14, 1897.

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banquet with 75 guests and speeches made by political figures.¹⁹ The firemen thanked the township board for the “interest taken in the building of their firehouse” but asked for a steam heater since the firehouse was built without heat.²⁰ By 1897, Excelsior was noted as “the strongest” and “most enterprising organization of its kind in North Hudson” County.²¹

The Excelsior volunteer firemen were active members from within the community. Oscar Louis Auf der Heide (1874-1945) who served as a member of the town council (1899-1902), the NJ General Assembly (1908-1911), as Mayor of West New York (1914-1917) and as a five-term congressman, was an Excelsior volunteer fireman for 7 years.²² Councilmen William Mayer Sr., public school janitor William H. Fink and health inspector Frederick G. Schneider, served as an Excelsior volunteer firemen for 21 years. In addition to the chief and two assistant chiefs, the company had 12 active members, three runners, five honorary members, an engineer who operated the steamer, and three members from the paid fire department. There were also 10 officers and three members on the board of directors.²³ Members who assembled there for an evening to wait for a possible fire were allowed to bring in beer.²⁴

The Architecture Dixon’s use of brick pattern work with limestone and terra cotta accents to rhythmically organize the facade, created a masterful arrangement which remains intact today (illustrations 1, 5 and 6; photo 4). Dixon’s facade design pulls from a broad range of sources. By combining Romanesque and Classically inspired details the facade shows a transition from the Richardson Romanesque style of architecture which was prevalent in the 1880s, to the Neo-Classical style of architecture which dominated the early 20th century for the design of public buildings. Despite being a low budget project that was completed in rapid speed, intricate details and high-quality materials were used including specialty items such as bull-nose brick for the corner pilasters, a carved limestone keystone, a terra cotta name panel, tinted mortar and a roof-top cupola for a fire alarm bell, horn or for decorative purposes. Intricate metalwork transformed the utilitarian wagon entry doors into a work of art (illustration 6). Dixon incorporated non-traditional construction practices including the use of an iron girder to support the first level floor joists at midspan instead of heavy timbers. The semicircular brick arches are built with standard bricks with tapered mortar joints instead of gauged bricks. Dixon’s Excelsior No. 2 firehouse exhibits the qualities of the work of a master architect. It was the most elaborate firehouse in West New York at the time of construction.²⁵

The Architect - Robert C. Dixon Jr. Robert Campbell Dixon Jr (1862-1933) grew up in Poughkeepsie, New York. He was the son of an English immigrant carpenter and builder, Robert Dixon and Margaret Campbell who was from Scotland and a descendent of the English Parliament member Sir William Lawson. Dixon attended River View Military Academy and Eastman’s Business College. He apprenticed at the office of D & J. Jardine

¹⁹ _____. “Excelsior’s New Quarters” *The Jersey Journal*, October 25, 1897 p. 3.

²⁰ Minutes of a regular meeting of the Township Committee, Nov 4, 1897.

²¹ _____. “North Hudson Notes” *The Jersey Journal*, December 14, 1896 p. 3.

²² Wikipedia, Oscar L. Auf der Heide; The Committee 1914; <https://bioguide.congress.gov/search/bio/A000338>

²³ The committee 1914.

²⁴ Minutes of a Regular Monthly Meeting of the Excelsior Engine Co. No. 2 of the Town of West New York November 9, 1914 p. 382.

²⁵ Sanborn Map of West New York 1900 Sheet 46 shows Excelsior as the only brick firehouse in West New York. The other three free-standing firehouses were wood-framed at that time. There was also a firehouse in the town hall building with a fire bell mounted in a wood tower behind the town hall.

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Architects of New York City for four years beginning in 1876.²⁶ In the early 1880s he moved to Union Hill (now Union City) in Hudson County and entered private practice after winning a competition. In 1882, he advertised architectural and construction services with offices at Lafayette Place in NYC and Palisade Avenue in West Hoboken.²⁷ His father Robert Dixon also worked as a builder in Union Hill suggesting a partnership of sorts.²⁸ Robert Campbell Dixon's most notable early works include a school in Union Hill on New York Avenue (1884) which was built by his father²⁹ and the exclusive \$30,000 clubhouse of the 500 member Palma Club at the corner of Jersey Avenue and Bright Street in Jersey City (1885) which was the largest social and athletic club in New Jersey at that time. Dixon's Palma Clubhouse had parlor rooms, a 6 lane bowling alley, a gymnasium and a rifle range (illustration 17).³⁰ In 1886, he married Sadie Morgan of Union Hill (now Union City) and the couple had two children, Leora Denzer (1898-) and Robert Kenneth (1888-) who followed his father's path and also became an architect albeit less successful.³¹

Dixon had a successful architectural practice. He was an eclectic designer who worked in various popular styles and was regarded as "one of the leading architects of Union Hill and Eastern New Jersey." Dixon and his wife were active in society with memberships at both the Columbia Club of Hoboken and the Palma Club of Jersey City. They owned a summer home in Sayville, Long Island and employed a servant at times. He was a founding member of the New Jersey Society of Architects, served as president of the Union Hill Board of Education, was a vice president of the American Institute of Architects, and served as a warden at Grace Church in Union City.³² Dixon and his wife attended the inauguration of Herbert Hoover in 1929.³³ He is buried in a private mausoleum in the Fairview Cemetery in Fairview, Bergen County.

In or about 1885, Dixon partnered with Thomas Stent and Arthur DeSaldern of New York City. Charles Abbott French replaced Stent and the firm was called French, Dixon and DeSaldern between about 1889 and 1894.³⁴ "Widely known in New York City" as designers of quality single family homes, row houses, apartment houses, and public buildings, French, Dixon and DeSaldern demonstrated "elegant appointments" and "painstaking care, combined with artistic culture and boldness and originality of conception."³⁵ DeSeldern left the practice and between 1894 and 1896, the firm was called French & Dixon architect.³⁶ Dixon resumed his solo career afterwards. Dixon's most notable works while in partnership include the Romanesque Revival Columbia Clubhouse in Hoboken, New Jersey (1891 - illustration 18), the First Baptist Church of Hoboken (1890), Saint Augustine School in Union City (1891), Engine Company No. 2 in Hoboken (1890) the "Washington" and "Columbia" apartment house on 45th Street in New York City and the Union Hill Town Hall (1891) at 3715

²⁶ Harvey 1900 p. 136; census records Poughkeepsie City, 1880, p. 7

²⁷ _____. "Robert C. Dixon Jr. Architect and Builder" *The Jersey Journal*, August 28, 1882 p. 4.

²⁸ Boyd 1886-7 p.176.

²⁹ _____. "Union Hill's New School" *The Jersey Journal*, July 6, 1884 p. 3.

³⁰ _____. "Jersey Clubs at War" *The New York Times*, December 20, 1886: Manhattan Life Insurance Co. *Palma Athletic Club* p. 137. 1893.

³¹ Census records Town of Union, 1900, sheet no. 22; Weehawken, 1910, sheet no. 17; Weehawken Township, 1920, sheet no. 11; Weehawken Township, 1930, sheet no. 5

³² Harvey 1900 p. 136; _____. "Robert C. Dixon Architect, Dies" *The Record (Hackensack NJ)*, December 23, 1933 p. 2.

³³ _____. "Mr. and Mrs. Robert C. Dixon Leaving for Washington, D. C." *The Jersey Journal*, Feb 29, 1929.

³⁴ Wikipedia, Robert Campbell Dixon; Royal Institute of British Architects, Vol. 2, p. 693.

³⁵ American Publishing and Engraving Co. 1891 p.174.

³⁶ Wikipedia, Robert Campbell Dixon.

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Palisades Avenue Union City, New Jersey which remains as the oldest municipal building in North Hudson (illustration 19).³⁷

The Excelsior Firehouse No. 2. in West New York was built within Dixon's first year re-entering private practice. Some of his other designs from this period include Weehawken High school (1900), Hoboken School No. 8 (1903), a school on Palisade Avenue in Union City (1903), St Joseph's Church of the Palisades and rectory at the corner of 21st street and Palisade Ave in West New York (1903), the First Presbyterian Church of West Hoboken (1906), a public school building at 18th and Jefferson Street Hoboken (1902), the State Manual Training and Industrial School for colored youth in Bordertown, New Jersey (1902), the fireproof German Hospital building in Greenville (1912), two schools in Hackensack (1903 and 1908), a \$6,000 Colonial Revival residence for Edward Rausch in Union City (1905), four two-story frame houses on Lewis street in Union City (1898), an apartment house in Union City (1904), a 6 family brick flat at 511 West Street Hoboken (1911), and a \$3500 cottage on First Street in Weehawken (1897).³⁸ His designs for local schools, churches, apartment houses and residences contributed to the development of Hudson County in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The Final Years of the Volunteer Fire Department By 1910, there were 7 volunteer fire companies dispersed throughout West New York (illustration 12). In addition to the three aforementioned fire companies that predated Excelsior, the Enterprise Hose Company organized July 26, 1901, Hudson Hose Company No. 4 organized March 4, 1906 and Monroe Hose Company No. 5 organized April 1909. In 1914, there was a total of 300 volunteer firefighters, 11 paid members who drove the fire wagons, and seven fire horses which were also used by the town for "sprinkling streets". In May 1915, Excelsior had 60 members 48 of which reached 7 years of service; 12 had served for less than seven years. Six member had departed.³⁹ In addition to their firefighting duties, the volunteer companies entered pumping contests at fairs, marched in parades including the Columbus and Labor Day parades in New York City, held balls and picnics and formed brass bands.⁴⁰ These early hook and ladder companies were "keen rivals as to the size and grandeur of their affairs."⁴¹ There was a great sense of camaraderie among the volunteers.

In the early 20th century, the town of West New York worked to improve the Volunteer Fire Department. The Excelsior Firehouse was heated in 1908 according to the plans drawn by Hudson Engineering Company of West New York (illustrations 9-11). Hickory Fire Company moved from their 1895 firehouse into an updated one built in 1913 and three new firehouses were financed by the town in 1912.⁴² By 1914, all of the fire companies had brick firehouses.

According to the 1910 Sanborn Map of West New York, the Excelsior Fire Engine Co. No. 2 had "1 fire engine [and] 2 hose wagons with 500 feet of hose [for] each" (illustration 2). In 1914, Excelsior and four other fire

³⁷ Harvey 1900 p. 136; Individual Structure survey Form Engine Co. No. 2 1313 Washington St. Hoboken; _____. "North Hudson" *The Jersey Journal*, December 20, 1892 p. 4.

³⁸ various newspaper clippings.

³⁹ Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of Exempt Fireman of the Town of West New York, NJ May 15, 1915 p. 400.

⁴⁰ The Committee, 1914.

⁴¹ _____. "Duhne's Hall Goes to New Owners" *The Jersey Journal*, August 16, 1929 p. 22.

⁴² The committee, 1914.

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companies used rented horses to pull their equipment; two of the fire companies pulled their apparatus by hand.⁴³ Photographic documentation confirms the use of horses. A hose wagon is shown pulled by a horse named Tom in front of Excelsior in a 1915 photograph (illustration 6). The steam fire engine is shown pulled by two horses in front of Excelsior in a 1914 photograph (illustration 5). The Excelsior Firehouse, however was not built with horse stables and it is not known where the horses were stabled, how they were fetched for a fire or if the volunteers pulled some of their equipment by hand. A horse stable may have been added by 1910 as suggested by the 1910 Sanborn Map which shows a small wood-framed appendage extending from the rear of the Excelsior Firehouse that does not show on earlier maps or plans (illustrations 2, 8 and 10).

The Creation of a Paid Fire Department The trend to replace volunteer fire companies with professional departments began after the Civil War. As the steam-powered fire engines became larger and heavier, horses replaced manpower and municipalities began hiring “drivers.” This created the part volunteer/part paid system that was used in the Township of West New York until 1915. In the larger cities where horse stables were incorporated into the ground floor plan of most firehouses, paid firemen were needed to stay on site 24 hours a day. In New York City, firefighters became full-time public employees in 1865.⁴⁴ The City of Hoboken established their paid fire department in 1891.⁴⁵

In March of 1915, the town council of West New York presented an ordinance to disband the volunteer fire department and modernize. Many were not in favor of this move, including the Association of Exempt Firemen which presented a formal letter of protest to the board of council.⁴⁶ Non-the-less in April of 1915, the town council adopted rules and regulations to govern the paid fire department.⁴⁷ The paid fire department was organized on May 15, 1915 with twenty-five men divided into four companies, the first motorized equipment was purchased and the volunteer fire department was officially disbanded.⁴⁸ Motorized fire trucks could cover a greater area than horse-pulled apparatus and therefore fewer firehouses were needed to cover the town. Call boxes and fire hydrants were placed throughout the town. Electric street lighting, gas, water and sewer lines were also added around that time. Between 1900 and 1915, when the paid fire department was established, the population jumped nearly 500% from 5267 to close to 25,000.⁴⁹ West New York which had grown faster than any other town in northern Hudson County, had become a modern city with silk and embroidery works serving a large source for employment.⁵⁰

In 1915, the Excelsior Firehouse was considered to be outdated. The new “motorized fire trucks” which replaced horse and man-drawn apparatus, required large rectangular entryways - a standard feature by that time. Excelsior’s arched-top wagon entry (7’-9” wide x 11-foot high) greatly restricted the size of the equipment which could be stored in the firehouse. Its overall width is further reduced by the original side flanked stone busters (illustration 6; photo 6). Due to the limited access and possibly other reasons, the old headquarters of Excelsior Engine

⁴³The Committee, 1914.

⁴⁴ <https://www.nycfiremuseum.org>

⁴⁵ <https://www.hobokenmuseum.org>

⁴⁶ Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of Exempt Fireman of the Town of West New York, NJ March 12, 1915 p. 91.

⁴⁷ Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of Exempt Fireman of the Town of West New York, NJ April 9, 1915 p. 94.

⁴⁸ Eickmann, 1948 pp 129-130.

⁴⁹ The committee 1914.

⁵⁰ Stinson, 1915 p. 35.

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Company No. 2 was not used by the paid fire department and the building was vacated in 1915 when the volunteers disbanded. This served to preserve Dixon's original facade.

The Exempt Firemen Association. The first exemption law for firemen in New Jersey is believed to have been passed in 1830. It was initiated by the Paterson Fire Association to exempt firemen who had served for seven years from militia and jury duties.⁵¹ Qualifying firefighters applied to the municipality in which his company operated and once approved, received an exempt certificate (illustrations 15 and 16). The certificate is filed with the County Clerk and entitles the firefighter to certain benefits by statute. Attendance at 60% of all fires for a seven year period was generally required to achieve Exempt status.

Exempt laws evolved over time. Some statutes exempted firemen from duties like street cleaning. In some states, Exempt firemen were exempt from the payment of a poll tax (a fixed sum levied as a precondition to voting) under an act from 1888, but this was repealed in 1903.⁵² A pension fund financed by a 2% tax on fire insurance policies was considered in the 1920s.⁵³

Exempt firemen founded the "Exempt Firemen Association" to serve as a fraternal organization for the volunteer firefighters who had reached exempt status. Local branches were formed in nearly every municipality. The Hoboken Association of Exempt Firemen established in 1860 as one of the earliest in New Jersey.⁵⁴ The New Jersey State Exempt Firemen Association was formed in 1889 with delegated members from local exempt organizations. It too was formed to cultivate friendship and insure prosperity and success among its members.⁵⁵

The Exempt Firemen Association of West New York was organized December 27, 1898. By 1914, it had over 110 members and had affiliations with the Hudson County Exempt Association, the Firemen's Relief Association and the State association (illustration 13). They had a memorial committee to decorate graves of departed members on Memorial Day and issue condolence letters. They even had a Ladies Auxiliary Club.⁵⁶ A twenty-five member traveling band was formed November 15, 1915 to accompany parades, political affairs and other outings (illustration 14). Meetings were held at the Liberty Hose Company firehouse until about 1915 and then were at the Hickory Engine Company until September of 1916.⁵⁷

In April of 1915, the Association of Exempt Firemen of West New York formed a committee to procure permanent headquarters and unused equipment. This was just before the volunteer fire company disbanded. The committee petitioned the town council to deed the Liberty Firehouse to the association which was much larger and newer than Excelsior and had been their headquarters previously. But for a reason not recorded in the monthly meeting minutes, the Excelsior Engine Co. No. 2 firehouse became their headquarters instead of Liberty and the town of West New York retained ownership. On September 8, 1916, "the members assembled at {their} old headquarters Hickory Engine Co. firehouse and from there proceeded escorted by the association band to our new

⁵¹ <https://www.patersonfirehistory.com/exempt-association.html>

⁵² _____. "Exempts Must Now Pay Pole Tax" *The Jersey Journal*, December 15, 1904 p. 6.

⁵³ _____. "Plan Discussed at Quarterly Meeting of Exempt Associations" *The Jersey Journal*, May 8, 1929.

⁵⁴ https://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/search/object/nmah_1381168

⁵⁵ <https://njsefa.org/who-we-are/>

⁵⁶ Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of Exempt Fireman of the Town of West New York, NJ April 9, 1915 p. 94.

⁵⁷ The committee 1914; Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of Exempt Fireman of the Town of West New York, NJ Sept. 8, 1916 p. 153.

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headquarters formerly Excelsior Engine Co. No. 2 firehouse at 666 Polk Street.”⁵⁸ Furnishing, trophies, instruments and other items were donated by Liberty Hose Company, Hickory Engine Company and Excelsior.⁵⁹

One of the first community service projects assumed by the Exempt Firemen’s association was the creation of a commemorative display that was permanently placed in front of the new City Hall in honor of exempt firemen both living and deceased. Local architect William Mayer Jr. was hired to design the arrangement which consisted of a statue dedicated the volunteer fire department and a fire alarm bell mounted on a stone pedestal. The project took five years to complete.⁶⁰ The fire alarm bell came from a fire tower that was behind the old municipal building and was transported September 29, 1917, “to headquarters [666 Polk Street]” where it remained until a suitable site was identified.⁶¹ The bell monument was dedicated on Labor Day 1919 and the statue was dedicated on the following Labor Day in 1920 with large celebrations (illustration 20).

The Excelsior Engine Company firehouse soon became too small for the needs of Association of Exempt Firemen. Architect William Mayer Jr., who had designed the commemorative displays, prepared the plans and specifications for an addition and the interior renovations (illustration 3 and 4). The town council financed the renovations and issued a “notice to builders and contractors” for bids “for labor and materials for the making of {an} addition and alteration to building belonging to the town and known as 666 Polk Street Exempt Firemen’s Headquarters.” The bids were due April 10, 1923.⁶² The town council borrowed \$18,334 for its construction with funds available in June of that year.⁶³ This suggests the approximate month construction began. Unfortunately, Mayers’ architectural plans and specifications were not found and the exact completion date is not known. Hopkins 1923 *Atlas of Hudson County* shows the building with its original footprint suggesting that the addition finished after the publication of that map (illustration 21). Daniel Van Winkle’s *History of the Municipalities of Hudson County New Jersey 1630-1923* lists Hudson Ave and 22nd Street (the firehouse of Engine Co No. 6) as their meeting location which apparently was a temporary meeting location while the Polk Street headquarters was being renovated.⁶⁴

Architect William Mayer Jr. William P. Mayer Jr. (1888-1975) was the eldest son of William Mayer (1867 - 1940) who immigrated from Germany in 1881 and Ellen Shek who was from Lancaster, Pennsylvania. The family settled in the area that was to become West New York in 1889 when William Jr. was 6 months old and when West New York was still sparsely settled. His father was a noted citizen of West New York and worked as school janitor, post master, member and assistant chief of the Excelsior No. 2. volunteer fire department, carpenter, builder, town councilmen (from 1906 to 1920) and saloon keeper; two of his brothers were firemen in West New York. The Mayer’s family lived near the Excelsior No. 2 firehouse on Polk Street above the “Excelsior cafe and hall” which in 1904 was built and operated by William Mayer Sr and which served as an unofficial

⁵⁸ Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of Exempt Fireman of the Town of West New York, NJ September 8, 1916 p. 153.

⁵⁹ Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of Exempt Fireman of the Town of West New York, NJ April 9, 1915 p. 93, May 14, 1915 p. 97 & 100.

⁶⁰ Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of Exempt Fireman of the Town of West New York, NJ April 9, 1915 p. 95. The procurement committee asked for the fire alarm bell held by Hickory Engine company No. 1.

⁶¹ Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of Exempt Fireman of the Town of West New York, NJ Oct. 19, 1917 p. 191 and June 14, 1918 p. 221.

⁶² "Town of West New York, Hudson County, N.J. Notice to Builders and Contractors" Hudson Observer (date and page not known)

⁶³ Notarized Claim by First National Bank against the Town of West New York, Hudson County, N.J., Temporary Improvement Note for \$8010.00 financing additions and Alterations to Exempt Firemen's Headquarters at 666 Polk Street (West New York: First National Bank of West New York, 1923)

⁶⁴ Van Winkle 1924 p. 520

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meeting place for Democrats.⁶⁵ The young and budding architect, William Mayer Jr, was well connected to the community through his father.

After graduation from grammar school in 1903 at the age of 14, William Mayer enrolled in a four-year course in architecture at an evening high school in New York City while working with his father in construction during the day and later as a draftsman for the New Jersey State architect C. A. Gifford. He also studied architecture at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York. He opened his own architectural practice in West New York in 1911 as one of the youngest licensed architects in New Jersey and at the height of a building boom in Hudson County. By 1923, he had designed over 1000 residential homes, apartment buildings, business blocks, factories, schools and public buildings throughout Hudson and Bergen Counties in New Jersey. His most notable buildings in West New York include the municipal building (illustration 22), the public library, Public School No. 1 and the First National Bank building. He also designed several firehouses including the Hudson Hose Company of North Bergen and the Peerless Hose Company of North Bergen. He was a member of the zoning commission in West New York and was active in many prominent business and social clubs.⁶⁶

William Mayer approached the task of expanding the old firehouse for use as an assembly hall and meeting house, as an adaptive reuse project. With the exception of the roof top cupola, Mayer saved the entire facade. He carefully installed a new metal name panel - "Exempt Firemen Assoc" - in place of the original terra cotta name panel to change the name of the building without altering the surrounding brickwork. A photograph from 1929 shows the facade after the completion of Mayer's renovations (illustration 4). The interior was upgraded and enlarged with a 42' long addition to meet the needs of the association (illustration 3). The addition allowed space for a large, fireproof assembly hall on the first floor with pressed tin-coated steel wall and ceiling panels, a dining and a bar area in the basement, meeting rooms and offices on the second floor.

Later Years In the 1920s, meetings were held every second and fourth Friday. Quarterly meetings of the Hudson County League of the Exempt Firemen Association were held at the building on a rotational basis. The Ladies Auxiliary club hosted an annual masquerade dance and a May walk for children.⁶⁷ Other organizations also used the building for meetings and events. The police department had an office at the back of the second floor. One event in 1923 featured women entertainers and drew a crowd of 400 men who paid \$3 a ticket. But it was considered to be too "spicy" and was shut down after the first act.⁶⁸

The Exempt Firemen Association continued to use the firehouse as their headquarters into the early 21st century. But by the early 1980s, the focus of use began to shift away from being a center of a vibrant community to that which was sporadic, random and limited. An informal museum was created to showcase an 1860 pumper, fire equipment, uniforms, trophies pictures, medals, antique helmets and a collection of antique trumpets from the fire

⁶⁵ _____. "Old Mayer House in WNY is Political Landmark" *The Jersey Journal* April 28, 1964 p. 1

⁶⁶ Van Winkle 1924 pp 145-6; Nelson, 1913 pp. 295-5; _____. "William Mayer Jr. 87, retired WNY architect" *The Jersey Journal*, October 21, 1975 p. 6; _____. "WNY Pioneer Born 100 years ago" *The Jersey Journal*, May, 23, 1967 p. 5.

⁶⁷ _____. "Many Dances Held in North Hudson" November 18, 1929 *the Jersey Journal* p. 14; _____. "West N. Y. Kiddies Enjoy May Walk" May 20, 1929 *The Jersey Journal*, p. 22.

⁶⁸ _____. "Firemen's "Snappy Show" is Halted by Raid on West New York Firehouse Follows Tip that "Spicy" Program was Planned". *The Jersey Journal*, October 15, 1923 p. 1.

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company band (photos 14 and 22). The old ledger books were stored in one office. Unfortunately, with a dwindling membership and a roof leak the interior has become unusable.

Conclusion Excelsior Engine Co. No. 2 Firehouse/ Exempt Firemen Association Headquarters served the community of West New York for over 100 years. This well-preserved Romanesque Revival building exhibits the character of a firehouse designed for man- or horse-pulled apparatus and a volunteer fire company. The building is associated with master architect Robert C. Dixon who designed the firehouse in 1897 and local architect William Mayer Jr. who remodeled the firehouse and constructed an addition to accommodate the headquarters of the Association of Exempt Firemen. The building is associated with two organizations that are important to the history of firefighting in West New York; The Excelsior No. 2 volunteer fire company which remained in existence from 1890 to 1915 and the Exempt Firemen Association of West New York, a social organization which acquired the building after the formation of a paid fire department.

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Notarized Claim by First National Bank against the Town of West New York, Hudson County, N.J. (1921, September 22). Temporary Improvement Note for \$8010.00 financing additions and alterations to Exempt Firemen's Headquarters at 666 Polk Street. West New York: First National Bank of West New York.

Regular Democratic Club of West New York "*Who is Responsible for the great development of West New York*" 1929

United States passport application of Frederick Kleinke May 7, 1910.

Websites

bioguide.congress.gov/search/bio/A000338

Hoboken Historical Museum - <https://www.hobokenmuseum.org>

New Jersey Exempt Firemen Association - <https://njsefa.org/who-we-are/>

New York City Fire Museum - <https://www.nycfiremuseum.org>

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Liberty Hotel
Atlantic County, New Jersey

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Paterson Fire - <https://www.patersonfirehistory.com/exempt-association.html>

Preservationnj.org/listings/exempt-firehouse/

Smithsonian National Museum of American History –
https://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/search/object/nmah_1381168

Wikipedia, Robert Campbell Dixon

Wikipedia, Oscar L. Auf der Heide

DRAFT

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Liberty Hotel
Atlantic County, New Jersey

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Verbal Boundary Description The boundary of property follows the outline of the West New York Municipal tax lot known as block 141, lot 4.

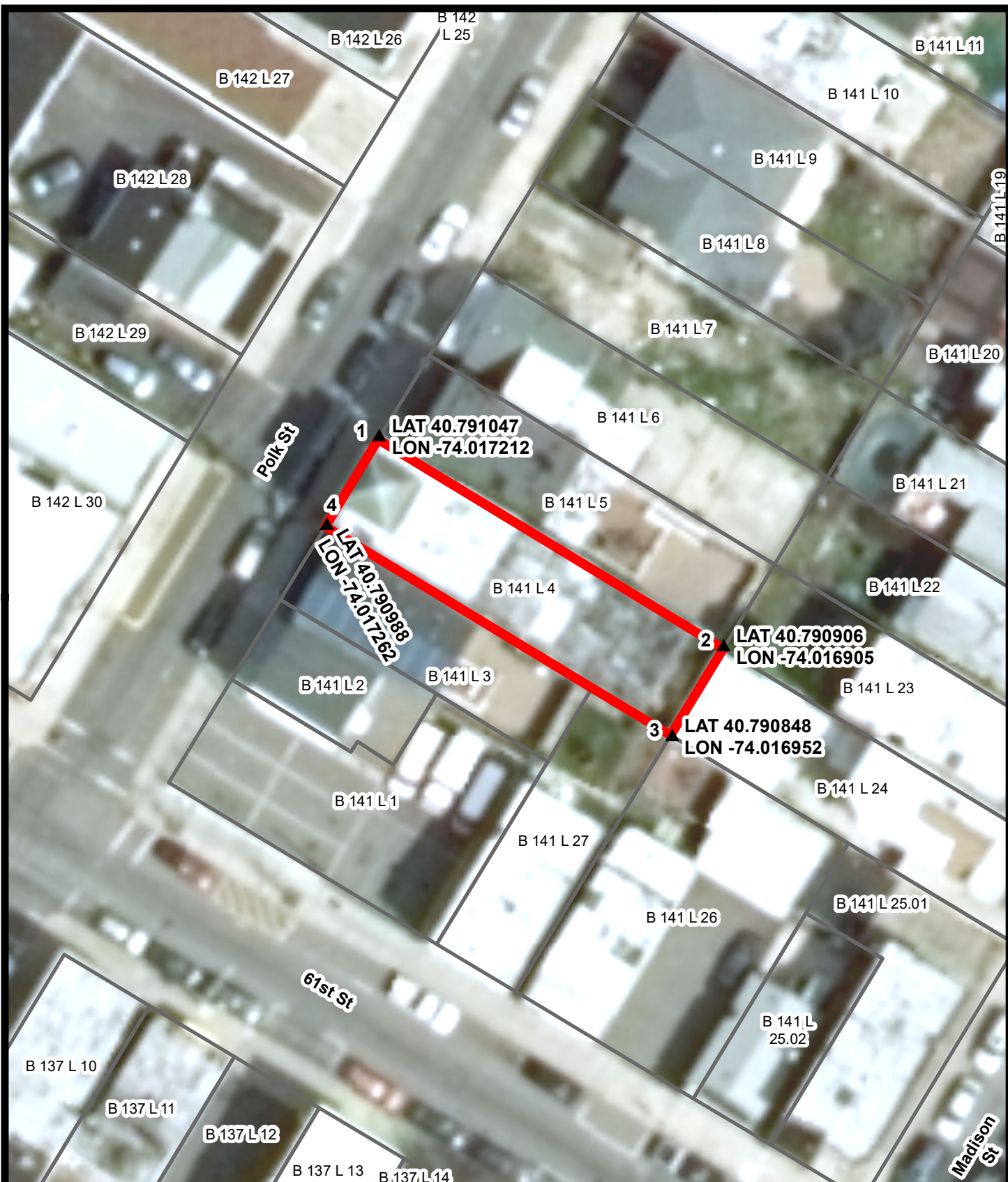
Legal Description of 6106 Polk Street, West New York:

All that certain Lot, piece or parcel of land, with the buildings and improvements thereon erected, situate lying and being in the Town of West New York, County of Hudson State of New Jersey

BEGINNING at a point in the Southeasterly line of Polk Street, a distance of 75 feet Northerly from the Northeast corner of Polk Street and Sixty-first Street, and running thence

1. NORTH 29 degrees 18 minutes East, along the Southeasterly line of Polk Street, a distance of 25.00 feet to a point, thence
2. SOUTH 57 degrees 13 minutes East, and parallel with 61st Street, a distance of 100.00 feet to a point, thence
3. SOUTH 29 degrees 18 minutes West, a distance of 25.00 feet to a point, thence
4. NORTH 57 degrees 13 minutes West, a distance of 100.00 feet to a point in the Southeasterly line of Polk Street, said point being the point or place of BEGINNING.

Boundary Justification Statement West New York Municipal tax lot, block 141, lot 4 is the most appropriate boundary of the nominated property. It was a pre-existing lot in 1897 when the building was constructed.



**The Excelsior Engine Co. No 2 Firehouse/
Exempt Firemen Association Headquarters**




**6106 Polk Street, West New York,
Hudson County,
New Jersey**

Boundary and tax map

0 10 20 40 60 Feet

Datum: NAD 1983 State Plane New Jersey

Legend

-  NJ & NR Nomination
-  Coordinates
-  Parcels Data (Block and Lot)

0.058 Acres



*NJDEP,
Historic Preservation Office
December 2021*

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Excelsior Engine Co. No. 2 Firehouse/ Exempt Firemen's Assoc. Bld.
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Illustration 1: Post card view of Excelsior Engine Co. Firehouse, circa 1914
Complements of the Association of Exempt Firemen

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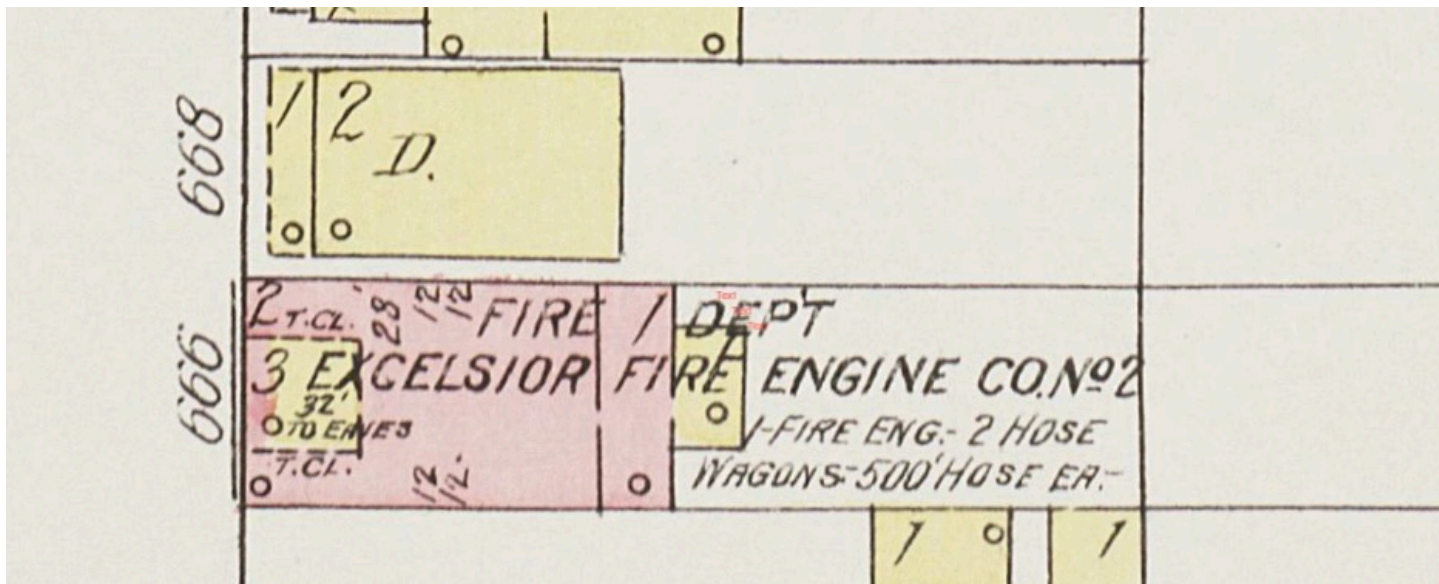


Illustration 2: 1910 Sanborn Map

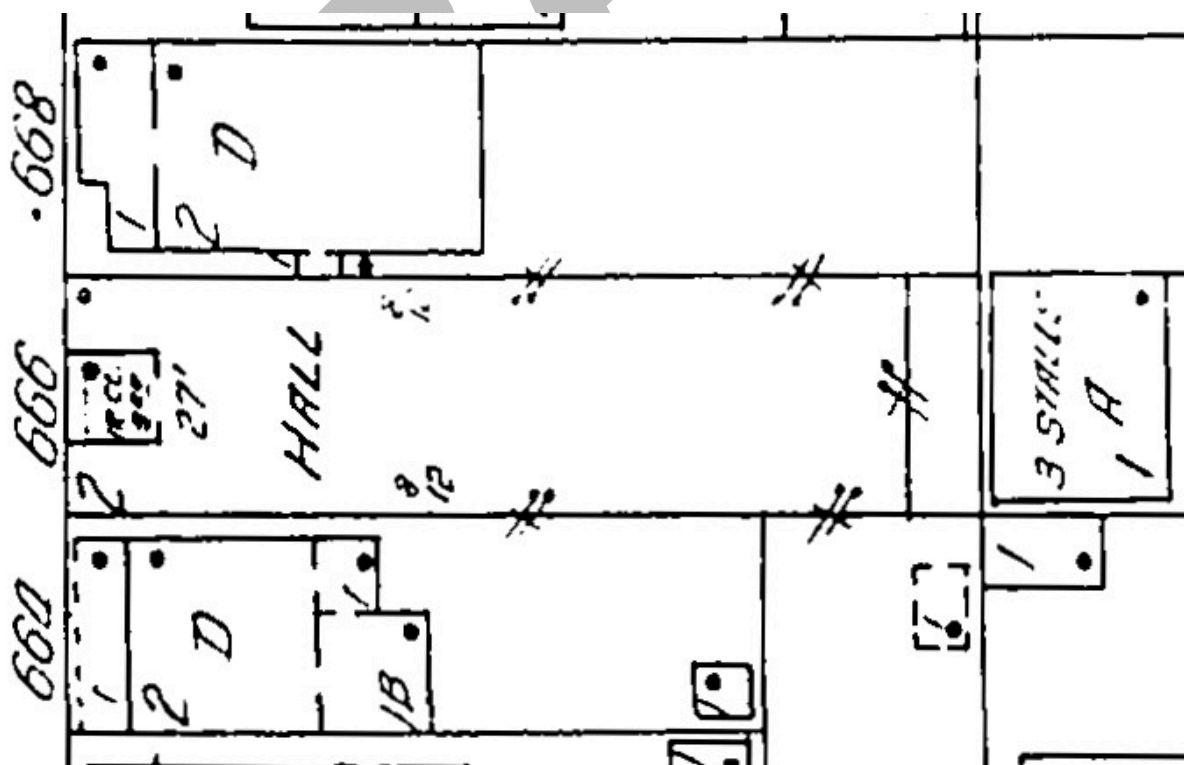


Illustration 3: 1936 Sanborn Map

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Illustration 4: Exempt Firemen Association Building, 1929

Regular Democratic Club of West New York "*Who is Responsible for the great development of West New York*" 1929
Complements of Alan Banister

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Illustration 5: Excelsior Engine Co. Firehouse 1914
(The Committee. *Twenty-fifth Anniversary of the Empire H. & L. Co. No 2 and Hickory Engine Co. No. 1* 1914.)

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Illustration 6: Excelsior Engine Co. firehouse, 1915
Complements of the Association of Exempt Firemen

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Illustration 7: Front and rear elevation drawings - Robert C. Dixon, 1897

Complements of the Town of West New York

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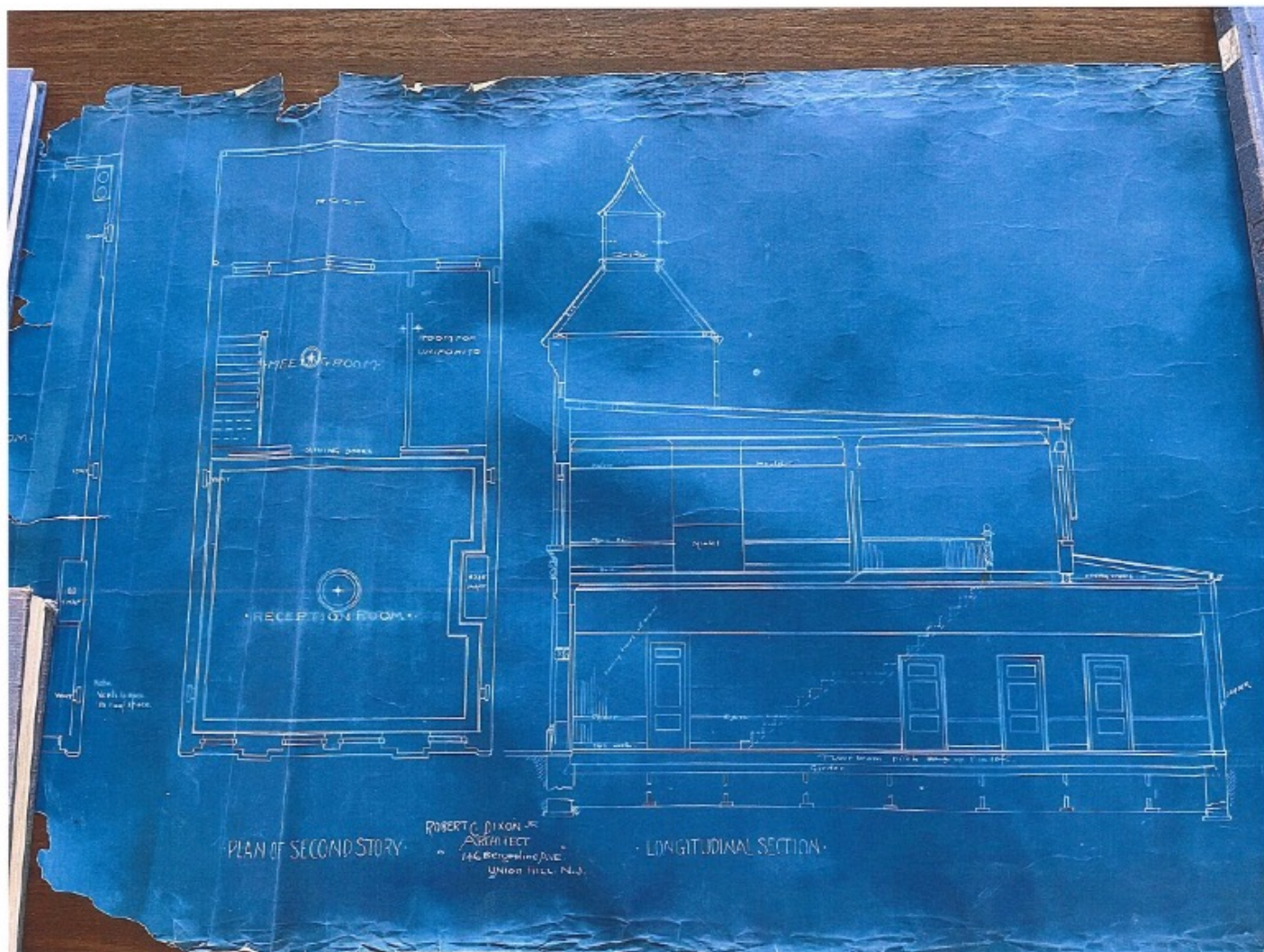


Illustration 8: Part of the first floor plan, the second floor plan and longitudinal section - Robert C. Dixon, 1897.
Note: the end of the blueprint is missing and only a portion of the first floor plan shows.

Complements of the Town of West New York

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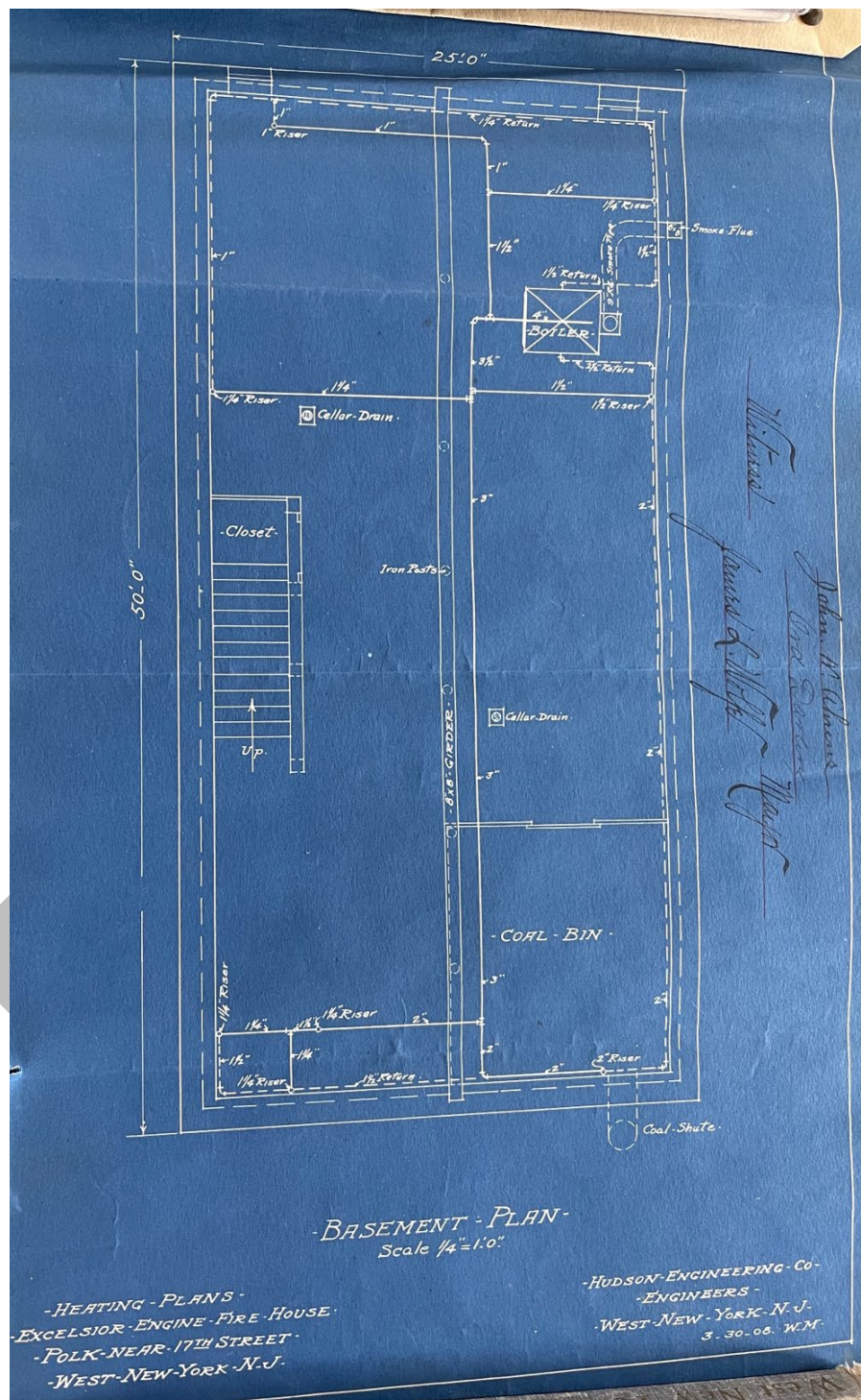


Illustration 9: Heating Plans - Basement – Hudson Engineering Company, 1908
Complements of the Town of West New York

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Excelsior Engine Co. No. 2 Firehouse/ Exempt Firemen's Assoc. Bld.
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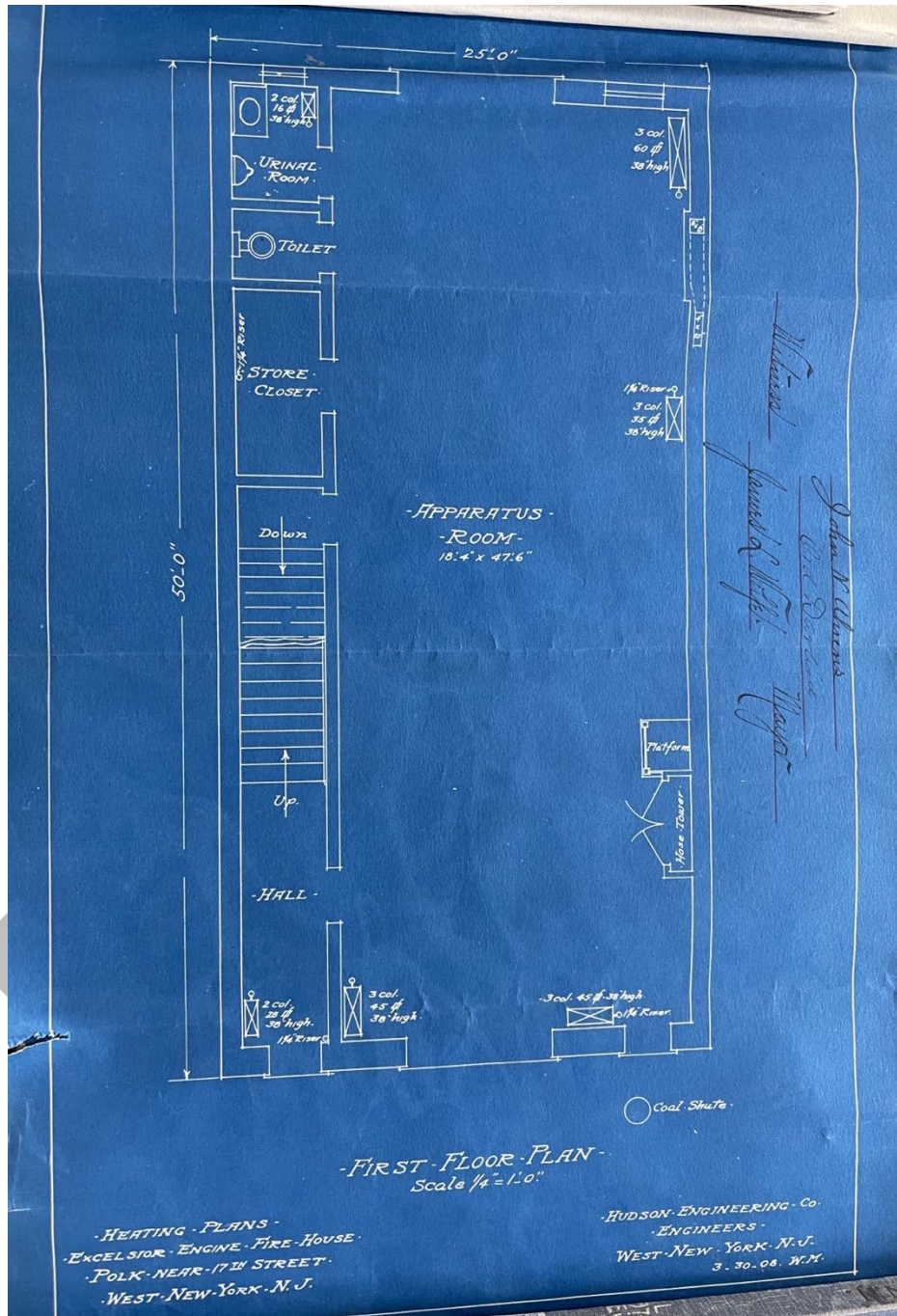


Illustration 10: Heating Plans – First floor – Hudson Engineering Company, 1908
(This plan likely shows the original configuration of the first floor)
Complements of the Town of West New York

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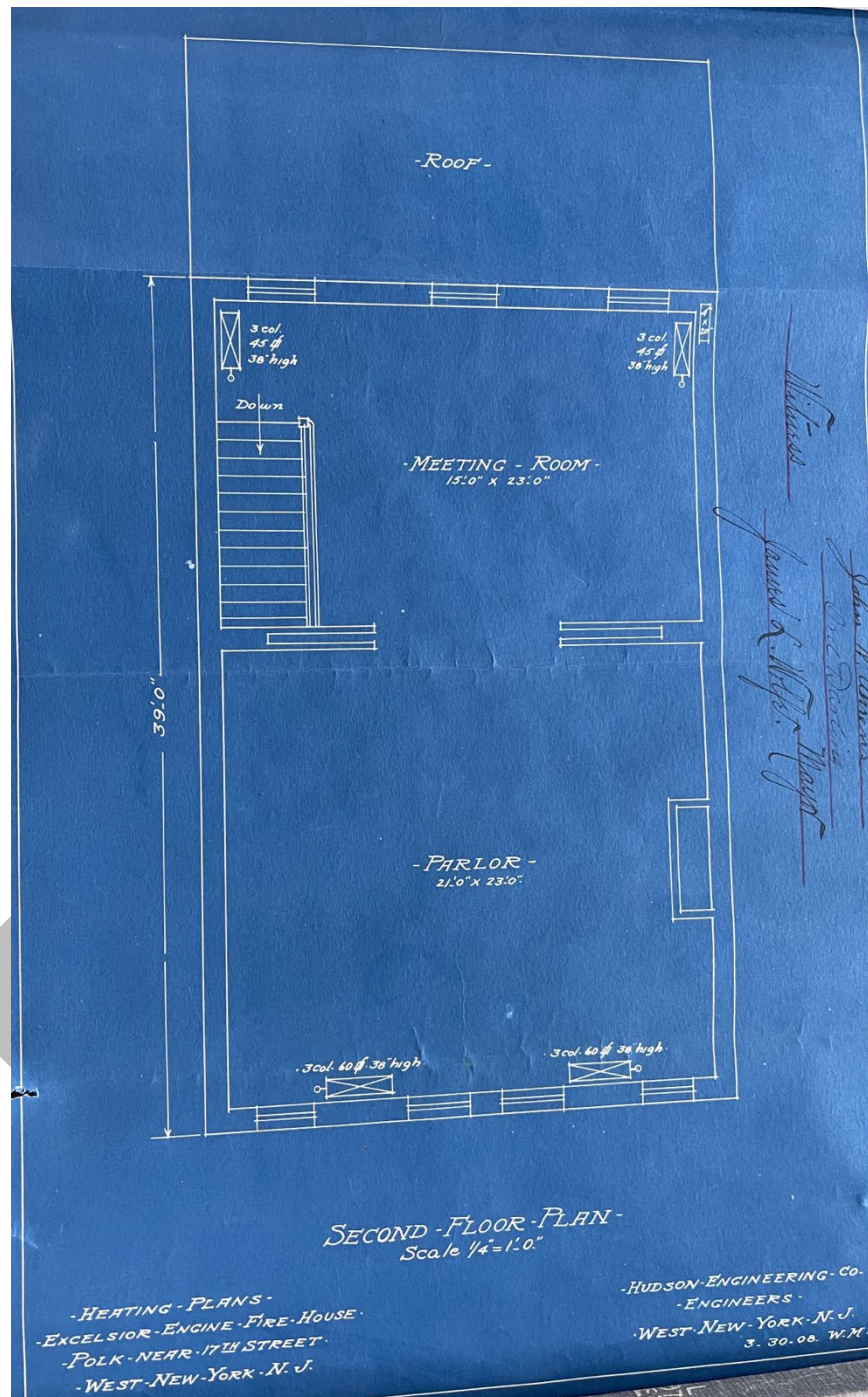


Illustration 11: Heating Plans – Second Floor – Hudson Engineering Company, 1908
Complements of the Town of West New York

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Excelsior Engine Co. No. 2 Firehouse/ Exempt Firemen's Assoc. Bld.
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Map of West New York, N. J.

- 1 Hudson Hose Co., No. 1
- 2 St. Mary's German Cath. Church
- 3 St. John's German Luth. Church
- 4 Public School No. 4
- 5 Hickory Engine Co., No. 1
- 6 St. Joseph's Roman Cath. Church
- 7 Public School No. 1
- 8 Old Trinity Reformed Church
(Italian Prot. Church)
- 9 Excelsior Engine Co., No. 2
- 10 Liberty Hose Co., No. 1
- 11 Old St. John's Church
- 12 Town Hall
- 13 New Town Hall Site
- 14 Public School No. 2
- 15 Monroe Hose Co., No. 5
- 16 Empire H. & L. Co., No. 2
- 17 Trinity Reformed Church
- 18 Italian Catholic Church
- 19 Public School No. 3
- 20 Public School No. 5
- 21 United Presbyterian Church
- 22 Enterprise Hose Co., No. 3
- 23 Swedish Lutheran Church

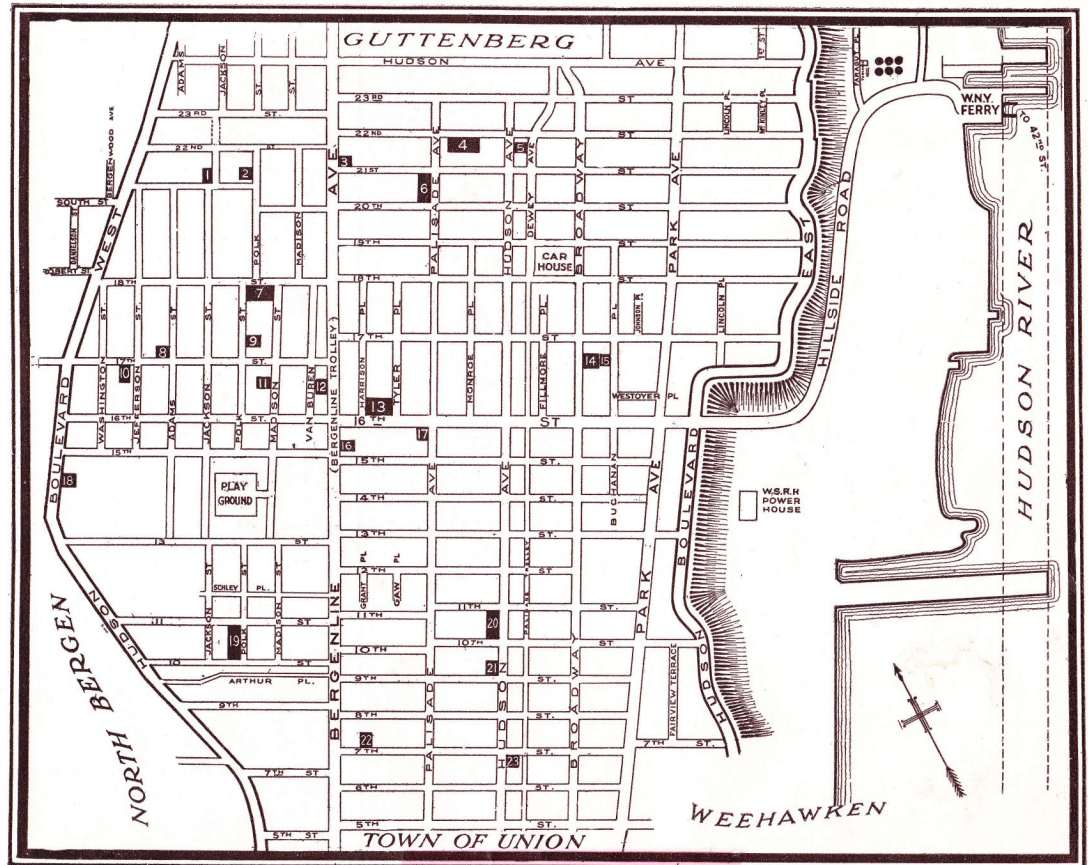


Illustration 12: Map of West New York New Jersey, 1914 showing the location of the seven volunteer fire companies.
(The Committee. *Twenty-fifth Anniversary of the Empire H. & L. Co. No 2 and Hickory Engine Co. No. 1* 1914.)

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Association of Exempt Firemen

of West New York, N. J.

Organized December 27th, 1898. Headquarters, Liberty Hose Co. Fire House

OFFICERS :

JOHN G. ANDES,
President
WM. BODENSIEK,
Vice-President
WM. H. FUNK,
Rec. Secretary
JOHN SCHMIDT,
Fin. Secretary
RUDOLPH KUNZE,
Treasurer
JAMES L. WOLFE,
Custodian
CHAS. MEWES,
Sergeant-at-Arms



Board of Trustees :

FRANCIS RYAN
J. L. SENCE
F. RITTERHOUSE

Investigating Com.:

JAMES L. WOLFE
JOHN E. OTIS
FRED'K PRICE

Finance Committee

JAMES L. WOLFE
JOHN DETHORN
A. MARKS

MEMBERS :

Alex. Ackerman, August Ahles, H. G. Auf der Heide, Chris. Bauer, Anthony Burkart, Fredk. Brickman, Reuben C. Brewer, Bernard Becker, E. R. Carpenter, Patrick Cannon, John S. Darling, George Dentzeau, William Dentzeau, William Dellinger, William Dippel, William Diehl, John Eagleson, John B. Fuhrman, Henry Forgeits, John Gallena, George Gleitsman, George Hahn, Conrad Hoffman, Andrew Heck, Robert Heck, Nicholas Hilts, Steward Hamilton, Joseph Hastings, John Hornung, Peter Inninger, A. E. Kuhl, Frederick Lacher, William Mayer, Henry Meckert, George A. Melrose, Robert B. Mills, Sylvester Merkel, John F. O'Shea, William Roome, Charles Schittig, Sr., Jacob Sulzen, Jacob Smith, Henry Sonntag, Louis Struss, Abram L. Sharpe, William Schneider, George Stecklein, John J. Scherer, Adam A. Smith, Chris. Schmidt, John S. Stecklein, Alex. Setaro, George Steger, Al. Sauerland, Fred'k G. Schneider, Jacob Trenz, John Ultz, George Wolf, Leonard Wolf, Frank Welch, Wm. J. Waller, John Weiland, Wm. A. Wolf, Charles Winkler, Max Zoeller, Michael Ruppel, Robert Werschmidt, Richard Fischer, Bernard McCue, Al. Meckbach, Charles L. Ullrich, James B. Corbett, Charles Berndt, James Lindsay, Conrad Gerisch, C. Baudendistel, Peter Stecklein, Henry P. Fischer, John H. Leseman, R. Pfeiffer, Wm. C. Fischer, Nicholas Henn, Wm. Fink, Wm. S. Donaghy, E. G. Feist, Edw. Goehrig, Garrett Fink, Sr., Wm. W. Dunavan, Gus. Boniface, Joseph Koeller, Jos. Smith, Frank Schueler, Chas. Schittig, Jr., L. Sommerhalter, George Winkler, Wm. Sulzer, Chris. C. Gronborg, J. Ensminger, A. Birkner, Wm. W. Rieger, Daniel Wolf, Walter Fischer, Henry Lippman.

Illustration 13: Members of the Association of Exempt Firemen, 1914

(The Committee. *Twenty-fifth Anniversary of the Empire H. & L. Co. No 2 and Hickory Engine Co. No. 1* 1914.)

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Illustration 14: Parade of Exempt Firemen on Polk Street at the Excelsior No. 2/Exempt Firemen's Association building, 1921

Complements of the Association of Exempt Firemen

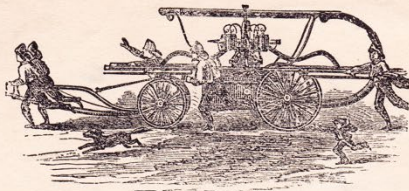
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ASSOCIATION OF EXEMPT FIREMEN
of the Town of West New York, N. J.
(INCORPORATED)

APPLICATION BLANK.

To the Officers and Members of the Association
of Exempt Firemen of the Town of West New York,
Hudson County, N. J.

Gentlemen:

I hereby make application for membership in
your association, I have served at least seven years
as an active member of the Fire Department under
the direction and control of the Town Council of the
Town of West New York, and holding an Exempt
Certificate issued in pursuance of a resolution of
that body.

I served as an active member of *Excelsior*
Engine Co.

My age is *32 years*

I reside at *614 Bergenline Ave.*

Signed *William Fink*

Dated *July 1* 191*3*

We, the members of the investigating committee
hereby declare that we have investigated the above
named applicant and find him to be of good moral
character and eligible to become a member of this
association.

Alfred P. [Signature] } Investigating
Committee

Note:—A proposition fee of \$1.00 must accompany this application.

Illustration 15: Application for membership with the Association of Exempt Firemen of the Town of West New York, signed William Fink, dated July 1, 1913

Complements of the Association of Exempt Firemen

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Illustration 16: Exempt Certificate Town of West New York Fire Department issued December 14, 1915

Complements of the Association of Exempt Firemen

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FROM HARPER'S WEEKLY.

Copyright, 1887, by HARPER & BROTHERS.

PALMA ATHLETIC CLUB HOUSE, JERSEY CITY, N. J.

Illustration 17: Palma clubhouse, corner of Jersey Avenue and Bright Street, Jersey City (1885)
Robert Campbell Dixon Jr. Architect.

Manhattan Life Insurance co. *Jansen's American Amateur Athletics and Aquatic History* 1828-1893. 1893.

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Illustration 18: Columbia Clubhouse Hoboken, New Jersey (1891) Robert Campbell Dixon Jr. Architect.

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Illustration 19: Union Hill Town Hall, 3715 Palisades Avenue Union City, New Jersey (1891)
Robert Campbell Dixon Jr. Architect.

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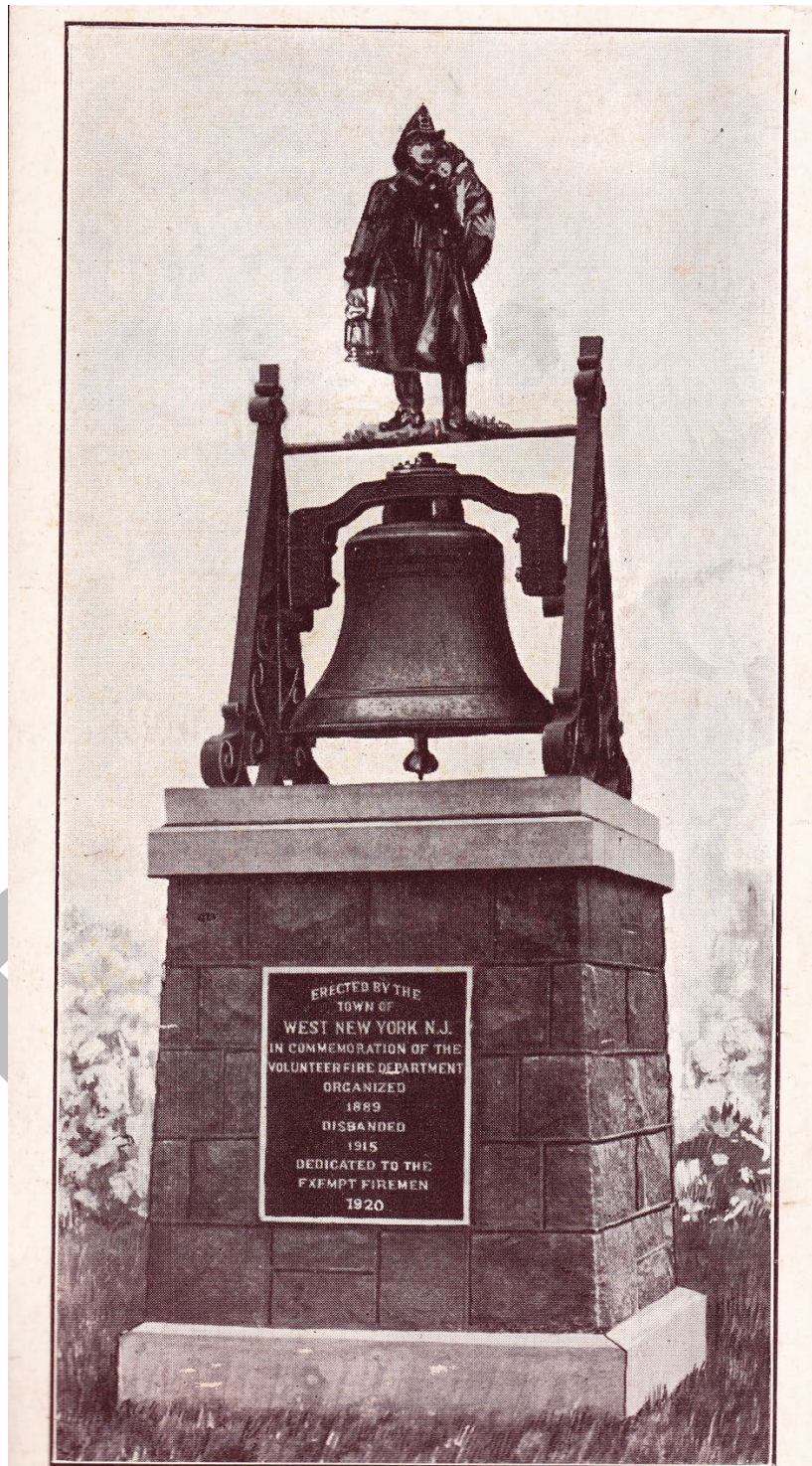


Illustration 20: Commemoration for the Volunteer Fire Department
Complements of the Association of Exempt Firemen

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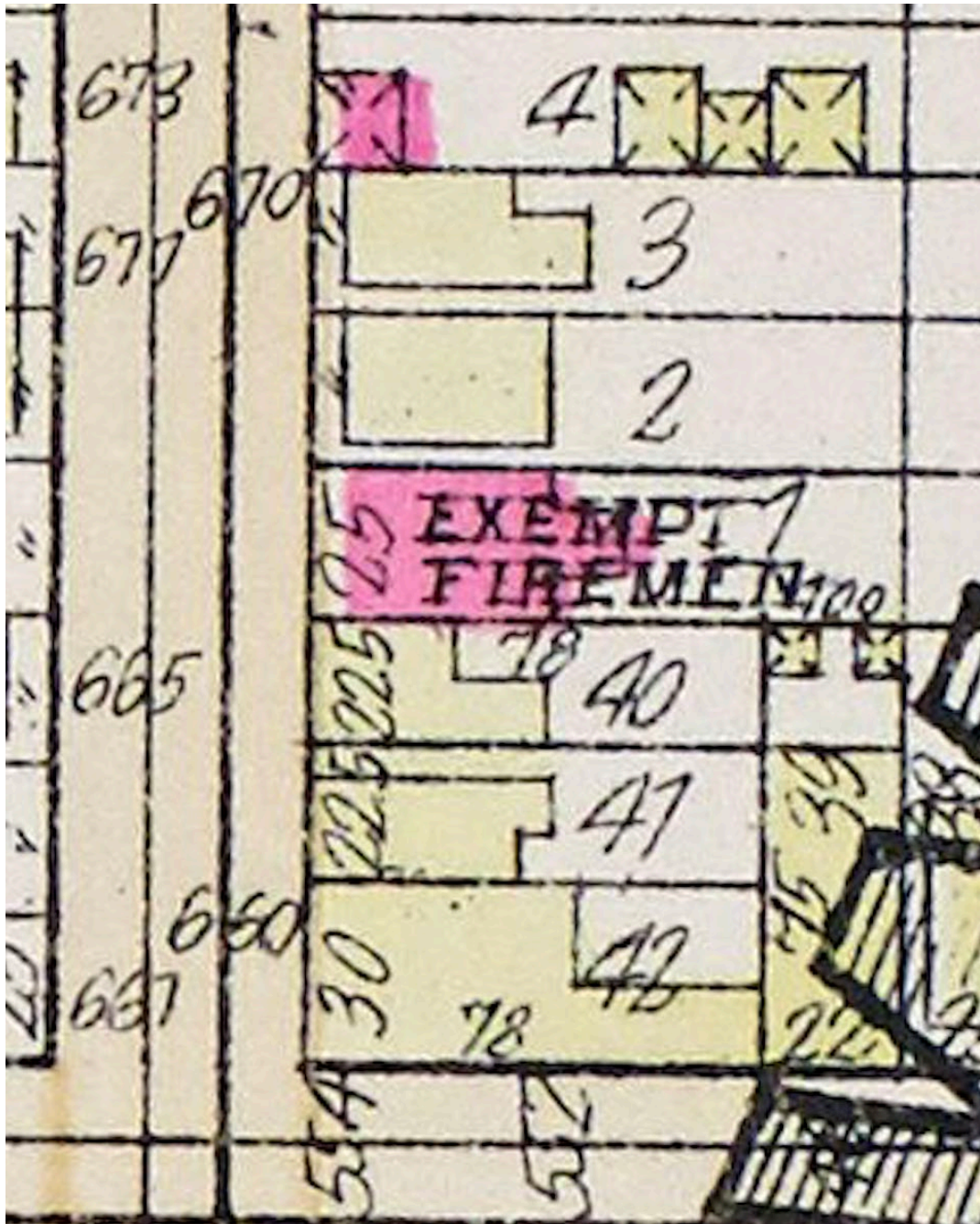


Illustration 21: G.M. Hopkins Co. Atlas of Hudson County 1923, excerpt from Sheet 19R.
This map shows the original footprint of the building.

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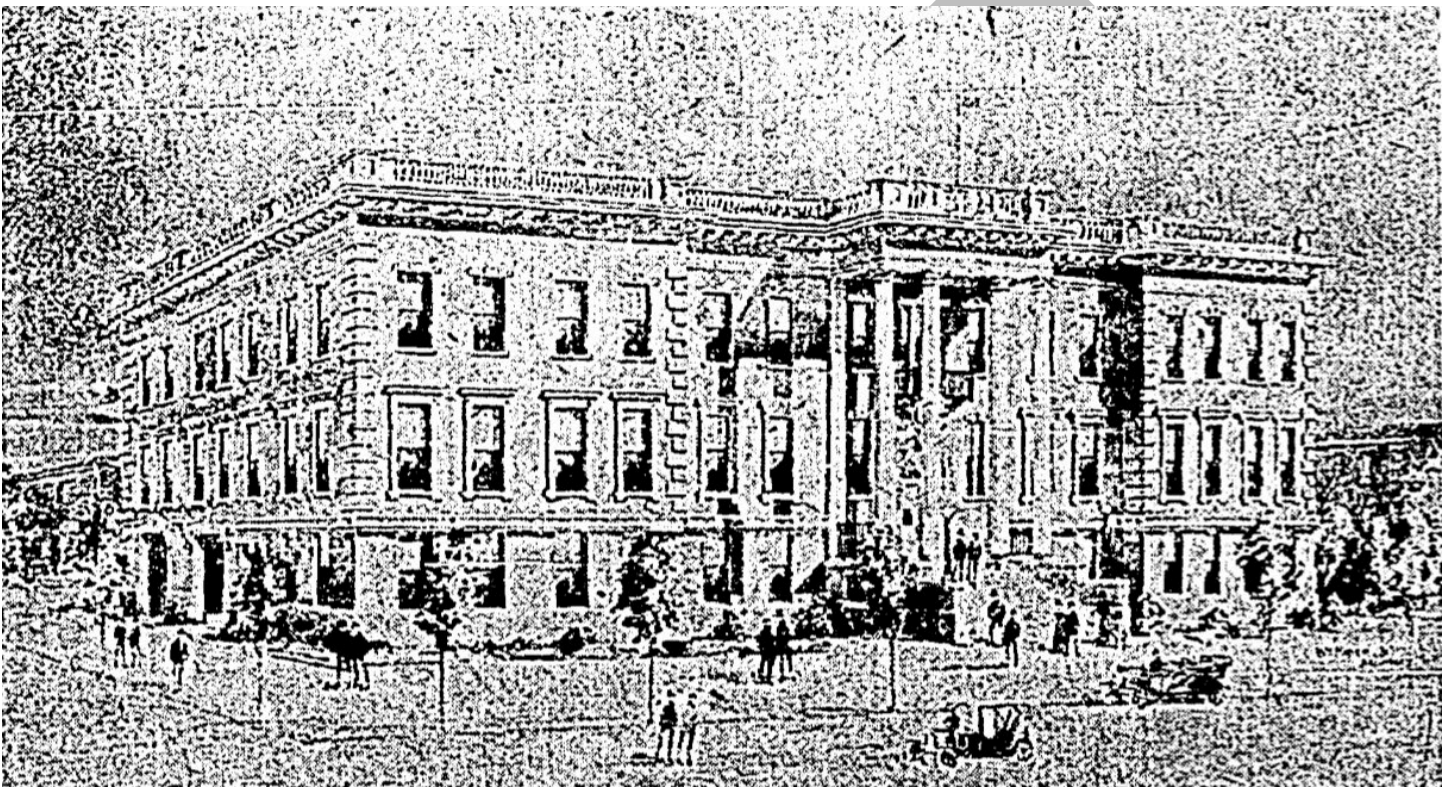


Illustration 22: West New York, Town Hall (1914) William Mayer Jr. Architect
The Jersey Journal "West New York's Town Hall Will be Dedicated on Independence Day" November 21, 1914.

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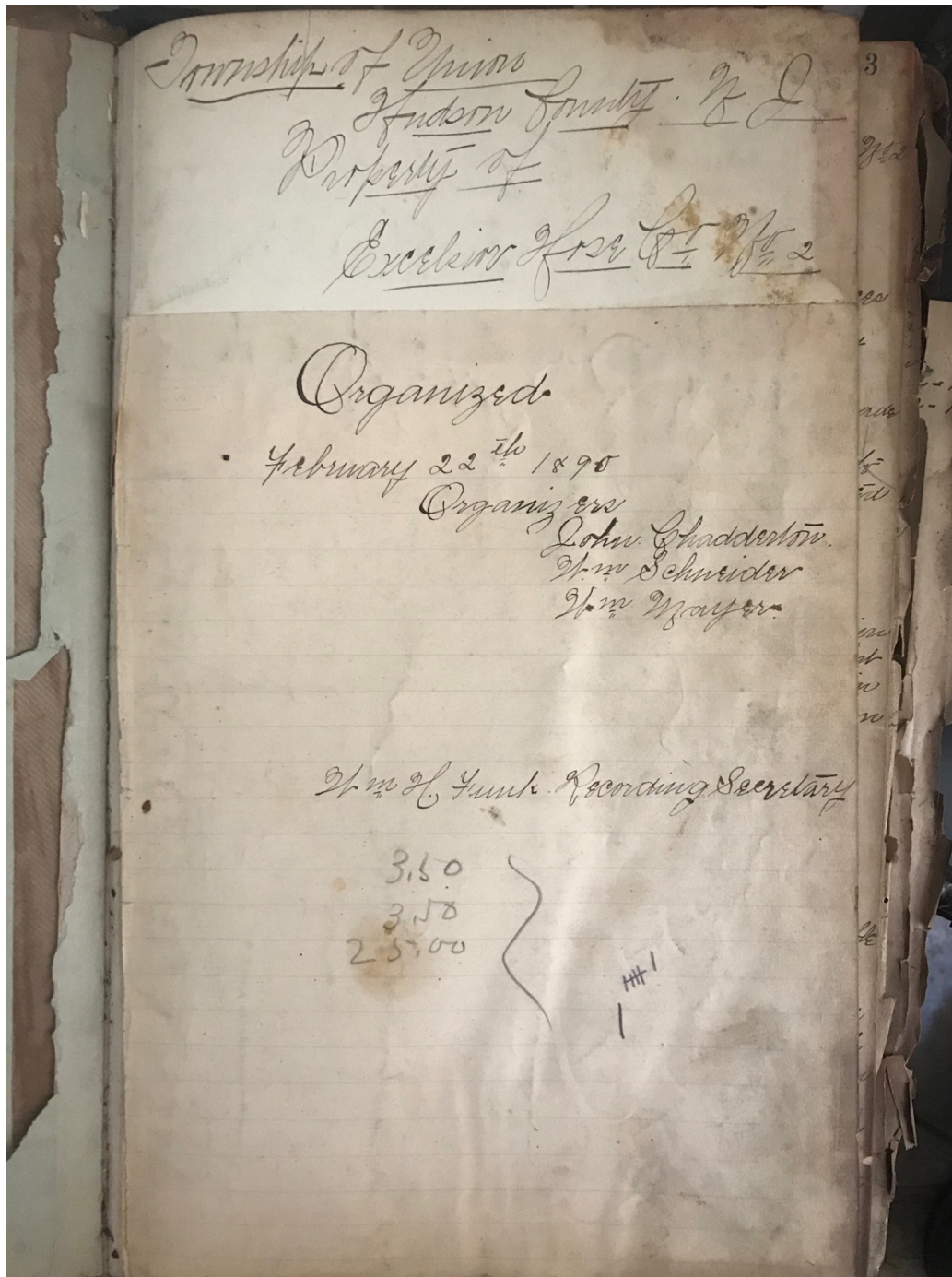


Illustration 23: Cover page of the Minutes of a Regular Monthly Meeting of the Excelsior Engine Co. No 2 of the Town of West New York

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Photo 1: View facing northeast on Polk Street

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Photo 2: View facing south on Polk Street.

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Photo 3: View facing southeast on Polk Street. Showing part of the north red common brick sidewall.

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Photo 4: Polk Street facade, view facing east.

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Photo 5: Name panel above the wagon entry and keystone

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Photo 6: Wagon entry

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Photo 7: Terra cotta Corinthian capital

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Photo 8: Carved limestone block at the springing of the arch above the wagon entrance

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Photo 9: Upper level

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Photo 10: South side wall of the 1923 addition

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Photo 11: Rear and south side wall of the 1923 addition

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Photo 12: Rear and north side wall of the 1923 addition

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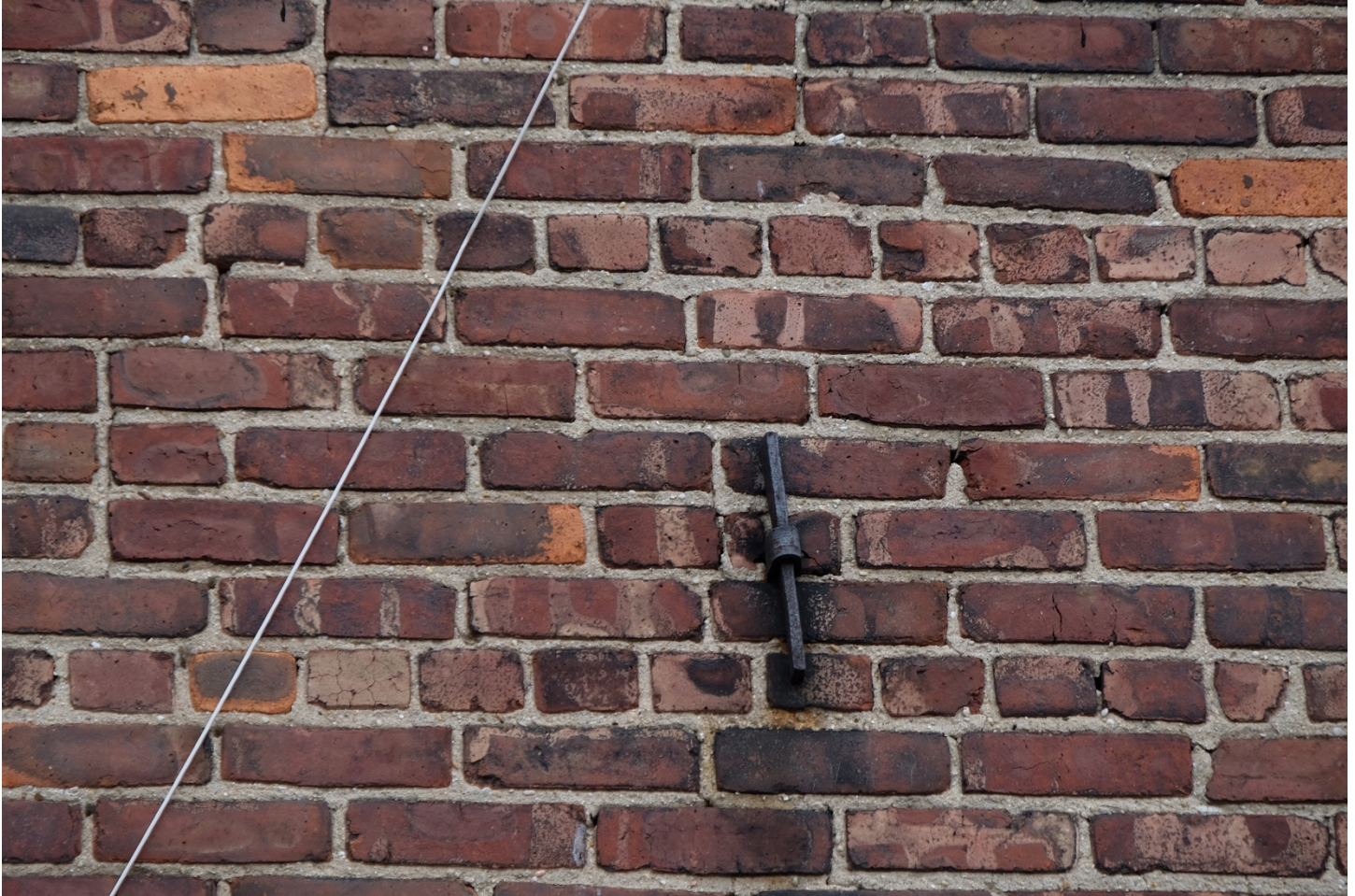


Photo 13: Detailed view of the brickwork at the south side wall of the 1923 addition showing an iron tie and the 5 course American bond.

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Photo 14: Interior - First floor assembly room, view facing east towards the 1923 rear addition.

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Photo 15: Interior - First floor assembly room, view facing west towards Polk Street within the footprint of the 1897 firehouse

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Photo 16: Interior - First floor assembly room, view looking up at the metal ceiling that was added in 1923.

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Photo 17: Interior - First floor assembly room, View looking up at the metal ceiling (1923) over the original beaded board ceiling (1897)

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Photo 18: Interior - First floor bathroom (1923)

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Photo 19: Interior - First floor stairs to the second level (1923)

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Photo 20: Interior - First floor stairs to the basement, view showing a typical five panel-door and the pressed tin wainscoting from 1923

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Photo 21: Interior - Second floor stair hall in the 1923 addition

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Photo 22: Interior - Second floor meeting room. View facing west towards Polk Street

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Photo 23: Interior - Second floor anti room. View facing west (1923 addition)

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Photo 24: Interior - Second floor meeting room. View showing the 1897 window trim.

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Photo 25: Interior - Second floor anti room. View showing the pressed tin wainscoting that was added in 1923

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Photo 26: Interior - Second floor meeting room. American Radiator Company radiator (1908)

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Photo 27: Typical doors and window trim (1923)

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Photo 28: Interior – Basement kitchen area (1923)

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Photo 29: Interior – Basement kitchen area (1923)

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Photo 30: Interior – Basement bar area (1923)

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Photo 31: Interior – Basement bathroom (1923)